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# Doing homework: negotiations of the domestic in twentieth-century novels of teaching

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DOING HOMEWORK:  
NEGOTIATIONS OF THE DOMESTIC IN  
TWENTIETH-CENTURY NOVELS OF TEACHING

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by  
Margaret Meredith Watson  
B.A., Wofford College, 1996  
May 2002

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## ABSTRACT

In this project, I analyze seven twentieth-century novels of teaching in order to investigate how notions of “home” and “school” are constructed, connected, and perpetuated in popular teaching narratives. Images of teachers in much of this century’s fiction often rest on views of the school *as* home that are derived from stereotypes of gender, race, and nationality—stereotypes that can be both inaccurate and repressive. For this reason, I examine these texts in light of how they negotiate school space with domestic space (“domestic” both as personal or familial, and as public or national). I contend that many of these narratives offer little more than simplistic, nostalgic views of what “home/school” space can be, and even fewer question the very equation of “school as home.” In those narratives that do probe the school/home connection, the teacher-protagonists often fail to emerge as the sentimental heroes that the teachers of the more conventional novels prove to be. Nevertheless, I argue that the most promising depictions of teachers and their work are those that acknowledge and engage the rich complexities of “home” and its (sometimes problematic) relation to the classroom, for the very tensions and conflicts that problematize the school’s classification as a domestic “safe haven” are the very tools that can facilitate growth, learning, and self-discovery.

The approach for my analysis draws from feminist and cultural studies, as well as educational history. The works I discuss include the following: *The Blackboard Jungle*; *Good Morning, Miss Dove*; *To Sir, With Love*; *Spinster*; *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*; *Up the Down Staircase*; and *Election*.

## INTRODUCTION

### GETTING SITUATED (OR, ESTABLISHING A HOME BASE)

*Home and school, school and home. The answer lies in that relation.*

—From Jane Tompkins' *A Life in School:  
What the Teacher Learned*

In early December, 1999, just as I was beginning to work on this project, a story about a schoolteacher from Fayetteville, North Carolina was occupying the attention of the American news media. Jane Smith had announced that she would be donating one of her kidneys to 14-year-old Michael Carter, a student of hers at R. Max Abbott Middle School. Just days after her announcement, CNN, CBS, ABC, and NBC's morning shows, as well as Fox News, Inside Edition and Extra, had all contacted Smith in hopes of telling her story. More interesting than the sheer volume of the coverage, however, was the spin that the story received from most news writers and producers. Virtually all of the reports went beyond acknowledging the generosity of Smith's act to sentimentalizing her role as Carter's teacher and holding up the story as an exemplar of the lengths to which teachers will go to serve their students.

Typical of such sentimentality is the following passage from a December 15 article in the online edition of the Fayetteville newspaper:

[Smith] has always gone the extra mile for her students, buying them supplies if they needed them, giving them rides and going to events if it was important to them. But that makes her no different from most teachers, she said.

"I think a lot of people don't understand how far teachers go for their students," she said.

She hopes what she's doing will persuade others to donate their body parts to people in need of them. (Jones)



Although Smith's advocacy of organ donation in the last paragraph is not targeted at teachers alone, it seems more than coincidental that this call for bodily sacrifice immediately follows her observation about the degree to which teachers serve their students. The juxtaposition of the two quotations, in fact, suggests that "teaching" and "donating body parts" must bear some logical connection. This connection is made explicit in an online December 26 letter to the editor, written by a local member of the Board of Commissioners: "If Cumberland County has such an award as 'Citizen of the Year,' I could think of no one who would be any more deserving than Jane Smith. She is an example of the quality that we have in the teaching profession in the Cumberland County School system" (Warren).

Shortly after the transplant, Smith appeared on NBC's *Today Show*, the top-rated morning television talk show, with Carter's mother and the doctor who performed the surgery. When Matt Lauer, the show's host, concluded the interview, he asked Ms. Carter if there were any final words she'd like to say to Smith. Carter replied, "I love you." The camera closed in on the two women, mother and teacher, sitting side by side in close alliance and "love." The boundaries between home and school had virtually collapsed, and parent and teacher were united in their extraordinary efforts to care for their common "child."

Months earlier, however, a drastically different vision of school and home had gripped the nation's consciousness. On April 20, 1999, Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, two high school students in an affluent Colorado suburb, walked into Columbine High School and opened fire with automatic weapons, killing twelve of their classmates and one teacher before turning the guns on themselves. For months, a shocked and terrified

nation wrung its hands and searched its soul, as commentators attempted to derive some measure of understanding of the various social and psychological factors that might have led to such a horrific event. Anna Quindlen's questions in *Newsweek*, for instance, were typical of the media's efforts to make sense of the event: "How much blame attaches to divorce and dislocation, how much to easy access to guns? How much culpability must parents share with their son, how much a violent society that plies its children with shoot-'em-ups? How in the world has high school turned into a ubiquitous venue for homicide?" (68). Ringing through Quindlen's musings here is an obvious note of despair—in particular, a mourning over the dissolution of peace and harmony within the nation's families and over a seemingly parallel loss of peace and harmony in the nation's schools.

Similar despair was echoed in countless other commentaries on Columbine, and in most, the despair stemmed from this same two-part source: the lack of safety and stability in public schools, joined with a corresponding lack of safety and stability in American families. Kay S. Hymowitz offers precisely these sentiments in two successive articles in *City Journal*, "Who Killed School Discipline?" and "What's Wrong with the Kids":

What's been lost is educators' crucial role of passing on cultural values to the young and instructing them in how to behave through innumerable small daily lessons and examples. If the children become disruptive and disengaged, who can be surprised? School discipline today would be a tougher problem than ever, even without all these changes [federal regulations diminishing educators' "authority"], because of the nationwide increase of troubled families and disorderly kids. ("Who Killed" 34)

Columbine made us wonder if we had been in denial about some sickness at the heart of the middle-class culture that most American kids know as reality. "Where were the parents?" many people asked, bewildered at how two teenagers

could build up an arsenal in their own bedrooms without their mother or father knowing. “What kind of schools have we created?” others wondered, on hearing that the two were making videos and writing essays for school about their vile fantasies without anyone being particularly impressed. (“What’s Wrong” 40)

Hymowitz’s coupling of school and home in these two passages couldn’t be more overt, much like the intimate close-up of Jane Smith and her student’s mother on the *Today Show*. Yet in the case of Columbine, Americans were not mawkishly celebrating the blissful union of school and home and praising the exceeding devotion of parent-like teachers; instead, they were *lamenting* the degree to which schools had become home-like, and reproaching the exceeding *neglect* of parent-like teachers. In this way, the media coverage of the events at Columbine also suggested that schools are like homes—but regretfully rather than happily so.

This schism between the rhetoric that surrounded each of these two “school stories” is indicative of a theme that has long run through discussions of public education, namely the degree to which schools can or should become “home-like” spaces. Even a cursory examination of the terminology that has surrounded the practice of Anglo-American education in the twentieth century reveals a strong association between the space of the classroom and domestic space. Indeed, schools are linked with home even in many of our most common phrases and expressions: “homeroom,” “home economics,” and “room mothers,” to name only a few. Thus, on one side of the debate are those voices who believe that teachers do act as surrogate parents (an idea that is particularly gendered and rooted in specific historical contexts, which I will discuss momentarily). At the extreme of this argument runs a rhetoric of idealization, the teacher emerging as a paragon of heroic nurturing and benevolent self-sacrifice. Contemporary manifestations of this idea include the Smith story cited above, as well as Walmart and Office Depot

“back-to-school” commercials<sup>1</sup> depicting (female) teachers negotiating with their spouses the portion of the family budget that can be devoted to buying school supplies for their new classes.

On the other side of the debate are the voices that recognize a disconnect between the school and the idealized, Cleaver-esque home. Though these voices do agree that schools resemble homes, their vision of the homes that are being emulated is much bleaker, for they assert that homes can be as violently hostile as they are benevolently nurturing. At the extreme of this argument runs a hopelessness that any sort of suitable “home” can be created in either families or schools that are situated within a context of capitalistic competitiveness, and rampant discrimination of all stripes. The discussions surrounding Columbine, as well as films such as *Heathers* and *The Virgin Suicides* attest to the prevalence of this grim view of schools, homes, and schools-as-home.

Capturing these two extremes of the school/home discussion is an observation made by Garrett Keizer in a Fall 2001 special edition of *Harper's Magazine*, devoted to a discussion of American education. In “Why We Hate Teachers: Notes on a Noble American Tradition,” Keizer writes,

For better or for worse, a teacher was our first surrogate mother. The wicked stepmother and the fairy godmother are mothers, after all, and in the fairy tales of personal history they both tend to have teaching licenses. In other words, the story of our first encounter with school is either the tale of how we betrayed our mothers for a princess or the tale of how they abandoned us to a witch. (39)

Of course, most mothers probably fall somewhere in between the two extremes of wicked witch and fairy godmother, and the same likely holds true for the teachers who become their surrogates. Yet, as can be seen in all of these media stories, including this one above, teachers often find themselves squarely at the center of the school/home

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<sup>1</sup> Aired in Louisiana, September 2000.

controversy, as the rhetoric of how schools either succeed or fail at becoming cozy “homes-away-from-homes” focalizes around the persona of the classroom teacher. This may leave the teacher in a problematic position insofar as his/her “real life” teaching is concerned. *Should* she attempt to be a surrogate mother? *Will* his teaching success be measured in terms of the “domestic” tranquility he’s able to maintain? *Is* she creating a home away from home? If so, what kind of home is it? Who does it protect? And who does it harm?

As I have already suggested, the various competing images of teachers put forth in the news media complicate these questions for “real-life” teachers. Complicating them further still are countless representations of teachers in *fictional* media, including print, television, and film. These fictional teacher stories are certainly as operative in the cultural imagination as the non-fictional ones cited above, and they are also packed with many of the same vast social implications. While Dennis McEldowney notes in “Sylvia Ashton-Warner: A Problem of Grounding” that many readers came away from Ashton-Warner’s novel, *Spinster*, with the feeling that it is “pedagogical propaganda in fictional form” (231), I would argue that all “teacher texts” act as “pedagogical propaganda,” and even more comprehensively, as political propaganda. Yet it is precisely because readers don’t always recognize them as such that they deserve serious interrogation. Thus, it is my intention in this project to examine several of these fictional teacher stories, stories which I consider to be representative of a wider body of “teacher texts,” with an eye towards unpacking some of the causes and consequences of this rhetorical association between the teacher and the domestic. My purpose is not to discard entirely the idea that classrooms do (and even should) bear some resemblance to homes; I only intend to

illustrate that simplistically sentimentalizing the “domestic” aspects of the school risks obscuring important tensions and conflicts among school members, and creates for “real-life” teachers expectations that are unrealistic, and even undesirable.

A thorough understanding of the contemporary manifestations of this connection between the home and the school, however, must rest on a broader understanding of the history and development of both institutions. For this, we can draw from the work of many scholars from varying academic disciplines, scholars who have already done invaluable research that informs any inquiry into teaching, domesticity, and the ways they have historically intersected. Perhaps the most obvious place to begin is with a brief word on the development of the demographics of American schoolteaching. In the colonial period, and for a time following the Revolutionary War, teaching fell almost exclusively to men. With the rise of the common school movement, and the country’s expansion westward, however, the nineteenth century witnessed a “feminization” of the teaching profession, as women began to take increasing numbers of teaching positions in primary schools. In *Motherteacher: The Feminization of American Education*, Redding S. Sugg, Jr. examines the cultural conditions—including political, religious, social, and philosophic trends—that prepared the nation for this shift in the make-up of the teaching force.<sup>2</sup> Sugg is careful to distinguish that “the democratic predilections that predisposed Americans to accept the feminization of education would have been insufficient for the purpose if feminization had implied feminism” (18). In order to avoid the stigmatizing

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<sup>2</sup> Sugg’s is only one of many fine studies on the feminization of American schoolteaching. In *Women’s Work?*, Joel Perlmann and Robert A. Margo draw from substantial statistical data in order to examine the ways in which the rate of the feminization of teaching varied according to geographic region. David B. Tyack and Myra H. Strober focus more specifically on the economic advantages of hiring women in “Jobs and Gender: A History of the Structuring of Educational Employment by Sex,” collected in Schmuck, Charters, Jr., and Carlson’s *Educational Policy and Management: Sex Differentials*. Edwina Walsh’s *Schoolmarms: Women in America’s Schools* also explores the historical reasons behind teachers’

label of “feminists,” then, advocates of women teachers, such as Catherine Beecher, argued that the elementary school was in essence an extension of the home, which was, of course, seen as the rightful domain of women. According to Sugg, “the employment of women as teachers was advocated by the domestic reformers, so respectable by contrast to the radical feminists, their argument being that teaching was a maternal function and the school properly an extension of the home rather than the first precinct of civil life” (18).<sup>3</sup>

Thus, even early in the history of American state-supported education, the act of teaching in a public school was linked with the act of mothering in a private home. As a result, teaching became idealized in much the same way that motherhood had become idealized during the Victorian era. The ways in which the Victorian cult of motherhood limited women in the home are by now familiar. In very literal, physical terms, the domestic ideal limited the spaces in which women were allowed to circulate, delineating the space of the home as the one “proper” place for women. The domestic ideal also placed on women rigid standards of moral and sexual purity, and expectations of unfailing altruism and self-sacrifice for the benefit of the children. When teaching became linked with parenting, and specifically mothering, these expectations extended to

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exclusion, and specifically women teachers’ exclusion, from educational policy-making and reform.

<sup>3</sup> Though many contemporary critics rightfully point out that these “domestic reformers” relied on very conventional notions of separate spheres for the sexes, one must not overlook the truly progressive aspects of their work. At a time when the education of women, much less the employment of women as teachers, was viewed as socially insignificant, activists like Beecher utilized the cultural framework that was available to them to argue for the importance of educating women. For instance, the following sentiments, offered by Beecher in “An Address on Female Suffrage” delivered in the Music Hall of Boston in 1870, capture the way in which conventional notions of gender roles were invoked for very *unconventional* ends. (The transcript of this address is collected in Willystine Goodsell’s *Pioneers of Women’s Education in the United States*):

Woman, as mother and as teacher, is to form and guide the immortal mind. She, more than any one else, is to decide the character of her helpless children, both for this and the future eternal life. And for this, liberal provision should be made; so that no woman shall finish her education till all that science and training can do shall be bestowed to fit her for this supernal duty. (197-98)

the teachers who were acting as “surrogate parents” in the “home-like” space of the school. As Madeleine R. Grumet has argued in *Bitter Milk*, an invaluable work on the sociological dynamics of women and teaching, “Although teaching provided one of the few ways that women could see themselves as participants in the world outside the home, the rationale for their presence in the classroom replicated the sentimental rhetoric of child nurturance that was being heaped on motherhood” (84).

These restrictive gender stereotypes that surrounded women’s entrance into the teaching profession in the nineteenth century have extended well into the twentieth century. Indeed, as late as 1936, female teachers in North Carolina still had to sign the following contract upon being hired:

I promise to abstain from all dancing, immodest dressing, and any other conduct unbecoming a teacher and a lady.

I promise not to go out with any young man except insofar as it may be necessary to stimulate Sunday School work.

I promise not to fall in love, to become engaged, or become secretly married.

I promise to remain in the dormitory or on the school grounds when not actively engaged in school or church work elsewhere. (quoted in Lemlech and Marks 28)

Emphasized in this contract, of course, is the expected denial and repression of the woman teacher’s sexuality, as well as the severe regulation of her physical body—even when she’s not in the presence of students.<sup>4</sup> Teachers’ behavior *in* the classroom, however, was no less restricted, as the cult of teacher/motherhood demanded that they deny all personal feelings in the service of their students. As I. N. Berlin, a contributor to a 1958 issue of *The School Review*, would regretfully observe,

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<sup>4</sup> In this context, the story of Jane Smith, the teacher who was heroized for donating a kidney to her student, resonates differently. Without diminishing the true benevolence of Smith’s act, the equation of her bodily sacrifice with “quality teaching” (an equation put forth in the articles and letters cited above) demands significant interrogation, for it is embedded in the rhetoric of the idealized mother/teacher who must render all service and altruism to her children. Because this rhetoric has resulted in the strict regulation of the teacher’s physical body, the labeling of such a literal “giving of one’s self” as “quality teaching” must be examined in light of the ways in which it might reinforce or perpetuate oppressive gender norms.



Many teachers . . . hold themselves to expectations that are unrealistic, expectations that can be a source of dissatisfaction and constant strain in the classroom. Some teachers, for example, think that they should love their students unfailingly and, in turn, be unfailingly loved by them. These teachers believe that their administrators expect to see signs of this unfaltering love whenever they step into a classroom. [ . . . ] Other teachers have the idea that the personality of the student is so fragile that firmness, anger, or insistence on study may produce trauma. These teachers make it a cardinal rule to treat students with utmost gentleness. (134)

This notion of teachers believing they should have unfailing love for their students has obvious ties to idealized notions of mothering, where the mother is all-patient, all-gentle, and all-kind, regardless of the nature of the children. Of course, the expectation of such utter self-effacement is ultimately not productive in the practice of rearing or educating children, but it *is* useful in regulating the behavior of the women who are engaged in these practices.

In fact, the passage above alludes to this idea of “regulation” in its reference to the administrators who might step into a classroom to observe a teacher’s work. Indeed, the history of school administration is intimately bound up in this history of the feminization of teaching, for even as women began to be allowed to take control of individual classrooms, for the most part, men still retained power over the schools and school systems.<sup>5</sup> Women at this time, even those who began to work in elementary classrooms, were often poorly educated themselves,<sup>6</sup> and the idea of women holding public positions of authority over men was still culturally outlandish; consequently, men were believed to be more competent administrators, and were given the responsibility of overseeing school policy and curriculum. Thus, the degree of “control” teachers had over their own

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<sup>5</sup> For more on this topic, see David B. Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot’s fine study, *Managers of Virtue*, and Linda McNeil’s valuable work, *Contradictions of Control*.

<sup>6</sup> In 1907, Indiana became the first state to require high-school graduation as a condition for all licenses to teach (Monroe 263).

teaching was actually mitigated; subjected to the observation and evaluation of higher-ranking school officials, teachers were often forced to forfeit their own ideas and creativity simply to keep their jobs. As Grumet notes, this dynamic created a troubling tension in the whole notion of the school as home:

[T]he contradictions that evolved in the nineteenth century between the doctrine of maternal love and the practice of a harsh and regimented authority, between women's dominance in numbers and our exclusion from leadership, between the overwhelming presence of women in classrooms and the continuing identification of men as the only persons with the capacity to know, are still present in the culture of schooling. (44-45)

Thus, in the nineteenth century (and even now), the “home” that was created in early classrooms was carved out of the same patriarchal pattern that shaped private, familial homes, despite the fact that these classrooms appeared to be primarily under the influence of women.

In all these ways, then, the historical associations between home and school have perpetuated certain gender stereotypes that can be limiting for women teachers. Just as importantly, however, these stereotypes can be limiting for men teachers, as well. Since schoolteaching largely came to be seen as “women's work,” men who entered this profession have been forced to face equally problematic gender stereotypes. If the school is envisioned as a “mere” extension of the home rather than a legitimate public workplace, male teachers—those who are not planning on becoming administrators—may be seen as having been unable or undesiring to secure work in the world of “men's men.” (The resulting stigma might be akin to that of the draft-dodger.) Indeed, in his groundbreaking (if now outdated) 1961 study of *The Sociology of Teaching*, Willard Waller observes, “It has been said that no woman and no negro is ever fully admitted to the white man's world. Possibly we should add men teachers to the list of the excluded”

(50). The association of the school with the domestic thus presents problematic gender dynamics on a number of levels, dynamics that therefore deserve to be interrogated in the fictional texts that portray the school or classroom as an idealized, home-like space.

In addition to perpetuating certain gender roles and stereotypes, the evolution of American public schooling as a “domestic” endeavor fostered restrictive assumptions about race, class, and nationality, as well. Indeed, citing Kathryn Sklar’s study of Catherine Beecher, Grumet notes in *Bitter Milk* “that the most important property of this new domestic space [i.e., the school] was its capacity to integrate personal and national goals. It fostered uniform communities, molded socially homogeneous human beings, and produced a set of predictable habits among contemporary Americans” (40). In this sense, the classroom was envisioned not only as the family-in-miniature, but also as the nation-in-miniature, the place where citizens would absorb the knowledge, habits, and values necessary for assuming their position within the democracy—whatever that position might be, for there was great debate at the inception of the common school movement as to who was to be prepared for which positions in the democracy. As Suggs rightly notes (again, in *Motherteacher*), the idea of state-supported public schooling in the nineteenth century was advocated by citizens from various stations of American culture, citizens who held varying—and often antithetical—convictions about the purposes of common schooling:

Mutually contradictory interests were accommodated in the working consensus in favor of common elementary schools as the heart of democratic educational practice. The establishment and the nascent proletariat of the Jacksonian era joined in support of public education on these terms for their quite different reasons. . . . [T]he intellectual leadership in the East increasingly thought of common schools as a means of social control. [ . . . ] At the same time, workingmen in the cities, representing the elements that the intellectual leadership

was most concerned to keep in order, could see the common school as a means of multiplying opportunities for rising in society. (13)

In other words, the dominant white middle class viewed schools as the place where other races and classes would become acculturated to their (subordinate) position in society (a concept I will discuss at much greater length in Section I); these “other” races and classes, however, viewed schools as the place where they could gain both the knowledge and the cultural capital to improve their position in society. As an emerging state trying to forge and secure its own national identity, then, some segments of American society came to rely on the schools as the primary vehicles for ensuring their own cultural reproduction, while other segments of society came to see the schools as a means for cultural transformation.

A number of critical theorists in the latter half of the twentieth century, from Michel Foucault to Michael Apple, have argued that the schools have served the project of social reproduction much more successfully than that of social transformation, and in so doing have replicated systems of discrimination and repression in terms of race and class. In 1970 Louis Althusser would even go far as to claim that

behind the scenes of its political Ideological State Apparatus, which occupies the front of the stage, what the bourgeoisie has installed as its number-one, i.e. as its dominant ideological State apparatus, is the educational apparatus, which has in fact replaced in its functions the previously dominant ideological State apparatus, the Church. One might even add: the School-Family couple has replaced the Church-Family couple. (27-8)

Althusser’s argument here—that the school has become the primary vehicle for maintaining the interests of the upper-middle class, or the “domestic interior,” if you will—has become a prevalent one, and it has obvious implications for the teachers within the schools who most directly bear the responsibility of preserving those interests and

thereby maintaining domestic tranquility. In other words, just as the notion of the school as the “family-in-miniature” contributed to the definition of “proper” roles and behavior for men and women, the notion of the school as the “nation-in-miniature” has contributed to the definition of “proper” roles for races and social classes.<sup>7</sup> And again, it has fallen principally to teachers themselves to observe these social and racial distinctions, as well as to impart to their students a sense of the “proper” values of the dominant society.

A case in point: recall Jane Smith, the teacher who donated a kidney to her student. There is a dimension of her story that, unlike her altruism and service, went virtually unnoticed in the mainstream media coverage. What the “talking heads” failed to talk about was the way in which Smith discovered her student’s ailment in the first place. The whole story began when Smith was watching her students during a lunch recess and noticed that Carter’s pants were so baggy that they almost fell from his hips. She reprimanded Carter, telling him to pull his pants up and chastising him for maintaining such an unkempt appearance. It seems little stretch to interpret this reprimand as a mild form of discriminatory cultural reproduction. The trend of wearing one’s pants very low on the hips is a contemporary style particularly fashionable among black, teenaged males, and it is one that is particularly derided among certain conservative (often white) observers. Though in the *Today Show* interview cited above, the interviewer briefly referred to the incident as Smith’s “teasing” her student, the teacher’s reproach could also

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<sup>7</sup> This point seems particularly timely, given the events of September 11, 2001. The weeks that followed the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were marked by a resurgent rhetoric of “the domestic,” culminating in President Bush’s creation of the new cabinet position devoted to *Homeland Security*. Almost instantaneously, this rhetoric infused discussions and depictions of America’s schools. On the day following the attacks, the media was flooded with images of schoolchildren sitting in their desks, drawing pictures of burning buildings, New York City firemen, and above all, American flags. On October 12, 2001 President Bush asked schoolchildren nationwide to join in a communal recital of the Pledge of Allegiance. And a book entitled *America: A Patriotic Primer* is currently being promoted as a

be seen as a defense of dominant, white, middle-class values against the invasion of other, marginalized cultures' traditions. Carter informed his teacher that his pants truly didn't fit, that he had lost so much weight recently that his clothes now literally fell off of him. It was then that Smith learned of Carter's kidney trouble and offered to give him one of hers.

Not one commentator noted the irony inherent in this story's beginning, perhaps because it problematized their presentation of Smith as the great American "teacher hero." I would posit as an alternative explanation, however, that Smith's adherence to dominant cultural traditions is simply another element of what is expected of "quality teaching," but is one that can be little spoken of, for it betrays something of the unpleasant costs of maintaining the dominant culture's power. Indeed, in her essay, "'The Ideal Teacher': Images of Paragons in Teacher Education Textbooks before 1940," Pamela Bolotin Joseph summarizes her investigation of an array of pre-1940 textbooks designed to give advice and guidance to both pre-service and current teachers. Joseph's most significant finding was that "what teacher education textbooks had in common was their advocacy of conformity to dominant community standards and their authors' perception of the coercion manifest in the community's relationship to the schoolteacher" (276). Granted, much time has passed since 1940, and much work has recently been devoted to investigating and challenging "dominant community standards," but I would argue that teachers are still confronted with an expectation that they not only conform to but reproduce such standards; contemporary Hirschian rhetoric bemoaning the lack of "cultural literacy" among American schoolchildren, as well as the prevalence

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crucial component of school curriculum. In strikingly visible ways, then, the classroom has reemerged as a central site for defining nationhood and protecting domestic interests.

of state-wide and national standardized testing, stand as testimony that public schools and its teachers are *still* held most accountable for (re)creating the dominant cultural tradition.

There is, then, some difficulty with “home,” especially as it is applied to the space of the classroom. Barbara Johnson has speculated, in her essay on Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (itself a novel very much about education, parenting, and the nature of home), that “for women as well as for men the home can be the very site of the *unheimlich*” (10). Thus, though the rhetoric that surrounds the “school-as-home” ideal may intend to portray the school as a safe cocoon of warm inclusion and friendly nurturing, the historical development of home spaces, both on the familial and national levels, is one that is, at least in part, based on principles of *exclusion*, repression, and denial—principles that are not entirely lost when “home” is extended to the school. Simplistically idealizing the school as a “home” modeled after the familial domestic may obscure certain injustices suffered by women; simplistically idealizing the school as a “home” modeled after the national domestic may obscure certain injustices suffered by non-white races and lower classes. This truth has not gone unnoticed by many observant practicing teachers. In *Teaching to Transgress*, for instance, bell hooks suggests that the same cultural myth that posits the home as safe haven has been extended to the school, as well: “Many professors have conveyed to me their feeling that the classroom should be a ‘safe’ place” (39).<sup>8</sup> hooks goes on to argue, however, that there exist tensions in the classroom that problematize its characterization as “safe”: “The experience of professors who educate for critical consciousness indicates that many students, especially students

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<sup>8</sup> Indeed, in *A Life in School*, her memoir of her career of college teaching, Jane Tompkins has argued, “I believe that school should be a safe place, the way home is supposed to be. A place where you belong, where you can grow and express yourself freely, where you know and care for the other people and are known and cared for by them, a place where people come before information and ideas” (127).

of color, may not feel at all ‘safe’ in what appears to be a neutral setting” (39). Like the contradictions and complications of many women’s experience of their familial home, and the contradictions and complications of many non-white, non-middle class citizens’ experience of their national home, many students and teachers alike encounter struggles within the school that preclude its classification as a “safe haven.”

Yet the simple act of acknowledging that home spaces are not always safe is a significant step in minimizing—even if not eliminating completely—the conflicts home might present for its inhabitants. For this reason, many scholars (particularly feminist scholars) have conducted a number of studies over the last several decades, interrogating the concept of “home” and analyzing it for contradictions, problems, and possibilities. Gillian Rose, feminist geographer, has looked at the material and physical limitations that notions of home have placed on women. She argues that “the everyday is the arena through which patriarchy is (re)created” (17). She also notes that when women are confined to the domestic sphere, they are particularly vulnerable to masculine violence, “both inside and outside the home” (35). Similarly, Catherine Wiley and Fiona R. Barnes have worked to complicate the conventional rhetoric of home as safe haven and retreat from the hostile outside world. It is important to note, however, that their work does not disavow the value and importance of home, but instead attempts to examine how “the concept of home . . . is a fertile site of contradictions demanding constant renegotiation and reconstruction” (xv). As a result, they regard home as a form of coalition: “between the individual and the family or community, between belonging and exile, between home as utopian longing and home as memory, between home as safe haven and home as imprisonment or site of violence, and finally, between home as place



and home as metaphor” (xv). Seen in this light, “home” ceases to be a static entity. While it might be consistently situated in the same locale, its significance shifts according to context and perspective; it resists simplified characterization.

This same understanding can be applied to the idea of the school-as-home. Echoing and complementing the call, quoted above, to see home as “a fertile site of contradictions,” hooks arrives at a similar conclusion about the nature of the classroom:

Suddenly, the feminist classroom is no longer a safe haven, . . . but is instead a site of conflict, tensions, and sometimes ongoing hostility. Confronting one another across differences means that we must change ideas about how we learn; rather than fearing conflict we have to find ways to use it as a catalyst for new thinking, for growth. (113)

As hooks here suggests, conflicts in home spaces can potentially give rise to learning opportunities, but only if such conflicts are acknowledged and confronted directly. This is not to posit an artificially happy ending to the centuries of discrimination that have been enacted in the name of preserving “domestic tranquility,” whether in homes, schools, or nations. It is to suggest, however, that naming, rather than sentimentalizing, the price at which such tranquility is purchased is a first step towards understanding and perhaps resolving such discrimination.

With the concepts of home and school thus situated in these specific historical and theoretical contexts, issues of domesticity should take on greater significance in the present examination of contemporary fictional narratives and representations of teachers therein. It seems especially fitting to frame a discussion of teachers and their representations within an investigation of narrative, for, as Jo Anne Pagano has written in *Exiles and Communities: Teaching in the Patriarchal Wilderness*, “a teacher’s medium is the narrative; narratives enact our connection to our work and to each other” (101).

Fictional narratives *about* us are also quite powerful, and can significantly shape our perceptions of who we are and what we aim to do as teachers. As Diane Dubose Brunner, author of *Inquiry and Reflection: Framing Narrative Practice in Education*, has asked, “Without exposing some of our most popular myths, how will our prospective teachers be prepared to do more than play school? The myths of our childhood are powerful, and they seem to indelibly imprint a world view that becomes accepted knowledge” (115). Indeed, fiction’s contribution to the practice of education is enormous, but it is too often overlooked in scholarly discussions of the improvement of education.

Of course, there are notable exceptions to this somewhat sweeping generalization. Many valuable discussions of the portrayal of teachers in film and television, for example, have surfaced over the last twenty years.<sup>9</sup> Attention to these particular media is crucial, for given their extraordinary mass circulation, they act upon the contemporary cultural imagination to a degree that print media may not. Nevertheless, print media cannot be disregarded entirely, if for no other reason than print narratives frequently stand as the basis for television and film adaptations. (All of the novels in this study, except for *Good Morning, Miss Dove*, were adapted to film.) A handful of important studies on representations of teachers in multiple media are also noteworthy. Pamela Bolotin Joseph and Gail E. Burnaford’s *Images of Schoolteachers in Twentieth-Century America: Paragons, Polarities, Complexities*, for instance, is a collection of essays that examine portrayals of teachers in various narrative contexts: film, television, textbooks, and children’s story books, to name a few. This volume’s comprehensiveness in

surveying the imagery surrounding teachers in twentieth century American culture is unsurpassed. It is a must-read for current and future teachers, and is a valuable resource as a cultural studies text. Chapter 5 of Brunner's similarly valuable *Inquiry and Reflection* is entitled "Teaching and Teachers in Stories of Schooling"; it is a condensed but rewarding examination of many of the issues I discuss here.<sup>10</sup> Finally, Jo Keroes' *Tales Out of School: Gender, Longing, and the Teacher in Fiction and Film* is an expansive survey of teachers in fictional narratives, stretching from twelfth-century correspondence between schoolmaster, Abelard, and his student, Heloise, to twentieth-century films such as *Conrack* and *Dangerous Minds*. As the title suggests, Keroes' inquiry centers around the concept of desire and how it is negotiated in narratives that portray a pedagogical encounter. All of these texts have opened a much-needed dialogue concerning the (mis)representations of teachers and students in cultural narratives, and they, along with Grumet's *Bitter Milk*, have been among the most crucial resources in my consideration of the issues raised in this project.

What seemed to be lacking from this body of scholarship, however, was an extensive interrogation of the widespread view of the school as home, as conveyed through images of teaching in twentieth-century fiction. For this reason, I chose to investigate how simplistic, unproblematic notions of home and school are constructed, connected, and perpetuated in seven twentieth-century novels that revolve around schoolteachers. I argue that few of these narratives offer more than nostalgic or

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<sup>9</sup> See Bauer, Bodnar, Burbach and Figgins, Crume, Dalton, Edelman, Elliott, Fallon, Farhi, Heilman, Hinton, Klein, Lasley II, Lytle, Moraites, Newman, Schwartz, Shannon and Crawford, Swetnam, Thomsen, Umphlett, and Will.

<sup>10</sup> The book as a whole is notable in its instance upon the value of narrative, and it contains a useful annotated bibliography of schooling narratives, in particular. For an excellent collection of such narratives, see *The Work of Teachers in America: A Social History Through Stories*, edited by Rosetta Marantz Cohen and Samuel Scheer.

sentimental views of what this “home/school” space can or should be; indeed, they often rest on very traditional constructions of gender, race, and nationality. Therefore, I conclude, the most successful, most challenging teaching narratives of this century are those that create images of classroom space that are as complex as “home” itself, offering a “fertile site of contradictions demanding constant renegotiation and reconstruction” (Wiley and Barnes xv). Indeed, I will ultimately argue that in these novels, the very tensions and conflicts that problematize the school’s classification as a domestic “safe haven” are the very tools that can facilitate growth, learning, and self-discovery.

For the purposes of this project, I have focused on texts published between World War II and the present. This chronological demarcation is admittedly a rather arbitrary one, and one that stems largely from the need to limit a topic that could grow to unmanageable proportions. Yet there were also immense changes witnessed in American education during this period (due, in part, to factors such as desegregation, increases in immigrant and urban student populations, the GI bill, and Cold War competition), and the composition of and beliefs about both familial and national “homes” shifted during this time, as well. Part of my motivation in focusing on this chronological period, then, was a desire to determine whether representations of teachers in narratives of education witnessed a corresponding shift, or whether they remained much the same as before.

In addition to confining my study to narratives of the latter half of the century, I have limited the scope of the project in three additional ways. First, although I have examined the implications of these narratives primarily within the history and development of American schools, I have included in the project discussions of non-American texts that were widely distributed in the United States, and that might have

influenced readers' perceptions of that history and development. In terms of text availability within the time period I have studied, advancements in printing and computer technology as well as in print, film, and computer distribution have all but dismantled the barriers of national borders. Of course, I do recognize that national borders are not insignificant, and I attempt to address the cultural context that would have affected an author's depiction of a particular school or teacher. But because I was not as interested in the nationality of the authors creating these narratives as I was in the narratives' contributions to the molding of the American public's perceptions of teachers, I did not want to limit my study solely to American texts.

Secondly, I have confined my analysis to representations of primary and secondary schoolteachers within formal educational institutions. Again, this decision is somewhat arbitrary, although not entirely without justification. While I believe that there are many similarities in the issues confronting secondary and college educators, the fact remains that elementary, junior high and high school teachers, simply by virtue of the greater volume of students they meet, occupy a particularly dominant place within the American imagination. Simply put, the percentage of Americans who have directly experienced education under schoolteachers is far greater than the percentage of those who have been taught by college professors. In addition, due to the frequency with which they meet with their classes and the younger, more "impressionable" students who most often fill those classes, K-12 schoolteachers seem to face a greater expectation to give personal, nurturing attention to their students than do their teaching counterparts in the university. Thus, the issues of home and the school-as-home on which I've chosen to focus seem to resonate more powerfully in settings where the "children" are younger.

Lastly, the texts that I have studied are those where the teacher is the protagonist, either as a first-person narrator or as the subject of a third person narration. Because I am interested in the teacher's perception of him/herself *as a teacher*, it seemed to make sense that those narratives where the teaching "self" is most explicitly depicted and described would be the best resources for the project. Much more remains to be said about the characterization of teachers in those narratives that are *not* focalized around the person of the teacher; it is simply outside of my scope of inquiry to say it here.

The project is broken into three large sections, each of which is devoted to a discussion of two or three novels. Section I is entitled "Preserving Domestic Tranquility (Or, Keeping 'The Angel in the School')." In it, I discuss *The Blackboard Jungle*, *Good Morning, Miss Dove*, and *To Sir, With Love*. All three of these texts present a very traditional rendering of the classroom as "home." They preserve conventional definitions between masculine and feminine spheres in home and workplaces, as well as present home, in the national sense, as the insular and civilized opposite of the "outside," foreign world. In all three texts, these notions of home and proper boundaries are presented as being crucial for the maintenance of domestic tranquility, both on the familial and the national levels. The classroom proves to be pivotal in perpetuating these notions, insofar as it is the site where such ideas are instilled in the students, as well as embodied in the teachers.

I do acknowledge that certain elements of all three texts serve to problematize the boundaries and conventions set forth in the main arc of the text. These elements sit just beneath the surface of the main story line, threatening to disrupt the strict boundaries established in the primary narrative arc. Nevertheless, they are contained and overridden

by the overall thrust of the narrative, and home, in its most conventional configuration, is preserved.

Section II, “Confronting Domestic Violence (Or, Where’s the ‘Room’ in ‘Homeroom’?)” examines *Spinster* and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. Interestingly, the issues that threatened to disrupt the earlier novels break through to the surface of these narratives. The conventional view of the domestic is contested to a much greater degree, and home is seen alternately as confining, stifling, threatening, and silencing. As a result, the protagonists of these novels fail to become the same sentimental heroes that the teachers of Section I became. As the teachers begin to “fail” in their duties of protecting and preserving the peace of “home,” the very ideas of domestic tranquility—and home itself—are questioned and challenged.

I conclude the project with discussions of *Up the Down Staircase* and *Election* in Section III, “Redefining the Domestic Interior (Or, Doing Some Home Renovations).” I begin by suggesting that the challenges to conventional conceptions of home and school spaces (discussed above) continued and intensified in many other texts, both fictional and non-fictional, of the later decades of the century. So forceful are these challenges, in fact, that the concept of the classroom-as-home virtually breaks down altogether. However, inscribed in *Up the Down Staircase* and *Election*, it seems, are attempts to re-configure notions of home and school. Paralleling the multiculturalist movement, and echoing certain strains of feminist and queer theory, the concept of home seems to be revisited and largely re-constituted in these novels. Though “home” is not abandoned entirely, it *is* redefined in a way that challenges traditional delineations of masculine and feminine spheres, as well as conventional notions of “the elect” (who’s “in” and who’s not). For

this reason, regardless of whether their protagonists achieve “hero” status, these texts allow for very productive renegotiations of what home is, who it includes and excludes, and how it might be extended, replicated, or challenged in the space of the classroom.

In his work on the genre of the college film in America, David Hinton has observed that “even the greatest distortions [of education] are presented to the American public without a whimper of dissent from the campus. It is strange that a profession so intent on studying the rest of society pays so little attention to how society looks at it” (7). What Hinton claims here about representations of higher education certainly seems to hold true for primary and secondary education, as well. A handful of studies have started to address the often distorted visions of teaching and learning presented in popular cultural narratives, but much more remains to be said about the causes and potential implications of these pervasive distortions. It is my hope that this project will add an extra dimension to this conversation.



## SECTION I

### PRESERVING DOMESTIC TRANQUILITY (OR, KEEPING THE “ANGEL IN THE SCHOOL”)

In this section, I examine *The Blackboard Jungle* (1953), *Good Morning, Miss Dove* (1946), and *To Sir, With Love* (1959), three teaching novels published during a fifteen-year period following World War II. Although both England and the United States at this time had “won the war” and were ostensibly enjoying an era of peace and harmony, I will argue that currents of national and cultural instability flowed just beneath the surface of this apparent serenity. As Jo Keroes has noted in her study of the teacher in fiction and film,

[a]s a post-war society still trying to reconstruct itself, the United States had a good deal invested in repressing those political, social, and psychological forces that threatened it with disruption. Though the army was integrated in 1950 under President Harry Truman, the races elsewhere remained effectively segregated, homosexuals stayed in the closet, women were denied equal economic and social rights, and McCarthyism flourished. (56)

Though Keroes here addresses a strictly American cultural climate, I will argue that England, too, was witnessing a similar period of instability in terms of race, gender, and colonial relations.

Given this context, I argue that all three of these novels work to present the figure of the teacher as a guarantor of domestic peace and harmony, a civil servant whose duty it is to protect the stability of “home” spaces. Essential to carrying out this duty, these novels seem to posit, is the teacher’s adherence to and maintenance of conventional boundaries between “the foreign” and “the domestic.” In *The Blackboard Jungle*, the figure of the teacher serves to preserve conventional definitions of home and workplaces as feminine and masculine spheres, respectively. In *Good Morning, Miss Dove* and *To*

*Sir, With Love*, the teacher is presented as one who preserves “home,” in the national sense, as the insular and civilized opposite of the outside, “barbaric” world. Though all three of these texts may hint that such distinctions between foreign and domestic spaces perpetuate restrictive stereotypes of both gender and nationality, they nevertheless resort to portraying these divisions as essential to familial and societal stability.

In this way, the space of the classroom becomes a space where definitions of the dominant culture are indelibly drawn. As such, it also becomes a space in which students are schooled on the roles they are to assume in relation to that dominant culture. The protagonists of these novels, then, as individuals who both teach and embody the divisions between the foreign and domestic, are portrayed as “angels in the school”; they are represented as both models and transmitters of the habits, beliefs, and values of the dominant culture, and are therefore crucial to the preservation of a domestic tranquility that, if repressive, is nevertheless stable and—in all senses of the word—familiar.

### ***The Blackboard Jungle***

*Why even try to reach them? Why not fool the system and fool  
the kids and fool yourself in the bargain? Why not collect a  
teacher's salary, and tuck the good vacations into your hip pocket,  
and all the while be an employee of the DSC?  
And you could forget all about being a man in addition.*  
—from *The Blackboard Jungle*

*The Blackboard Jungle*, Evan Hunter's 1953 novel about an English teacher in an urban vocational high school, stands as a precursor to what would become a familiar trope in the teacher narratives of the latter half of the twentieth century: the teacher as a brave explorer who sets out into uncharted territory to face and conquer the elements, the land, and the “primitive” natives. In this text, Rick Dadier is the novel's “hero,” a young, idealistic first-year teacher who finds that he must literally battle his way through North

Manual Trades High School. The “natives” are his students, menacing threats who challenge Rick with not only their fists but with their switchblades, as well. Thus, the man who begins with intentions of leading his students along the “flowery path of knowledge”<sup>1</sup> finds that the flowery path is actually a hostile jungle, and believes that he must resort to a pedagogy of domination simply in order to survive, before he can even think about *teaching* the student savages. In the end, of course, the independent hero overcomes all odds to win not only the battle for his students’ attention and respect, but also, finally, the war for their submission to his authority.

Despite the significant popular success of both the novel and its subsequent film adaptation, surprisingly few scholars have mined this narrative for the ways in which it might have reflected and shaped the perception of schoolteachers in the mid-twentieth century. Moreover, no critic has addressed the ways in which the text handles depictions of the teacher’s domestic life—home and family—and how those depictions might be interrelated with the story of his professional life. Though *The Blackboard Jungle* does center primarily around a teacher and his teaching in a public school, significant story time is nevertheless devoted to depictions of the protagonist’s personal and family life, as well. To ignore the interplay between the public and private spheres would thus be to ignore a crucial portion of the narrative. The danger of such an omission, of course, is that it might itself perpetuate the decidedly false notion that these two spheres, public and private, are distinctly separate, rather than mutually dependent and determining.

A notable exception to the general lack of scholarly attention given to this novel is Jo Keroes’ analysis of the film in her discerning study, *Tales Out of School: Gender,*

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<sup>1</sup> From Washington Irving’s “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.” The phrase is used as a contrast to the pedagogy of Ichabod Crane, who is himself a schoolteacher.

*Longing, and the Teacher in Fiction and Film*. In the chapter titled, “It’s a Jungle Out There: Juvenile Violence and the Perils of Love,” Keroes rightly notes that encoded in the film’s trope of teaching as combat are deeply embedded notions of gender and its construction. She writes, “I think it is useful to see this and other films like it, in which the teacher’s toughness and determination and courage are the means by which he demonstrates what amounts to love for his students, as a working out of certain masculine anxieties and imperatives” (59). Keroes’ subsequent examination details how these anxieties, fears primarily of femininity and homosexuality, are grafted onto the public setting of the pedagogical encounter. What Keroes’ analysis does not address, however, is how these fears—as well as their manifestation in the school setting—are not simply matters of gender roles and designations in the public arenas of education, politics, and work. Though she is correct when she asserts that “*The Blackboard Jungle* is concerned with ethical values in the public sphere, an arena that traditionally excludes women,” her study includes little discussion of the fact that in 1950s America, school teaching was one of those rare sectors of the public sphere that not only did not exclude women, but was dominated by them. Keroes also neglects to note those ways in which the narrative is concerned with ethical values in the private sphere, as well.

Thus, it seems worthwhile to revisit *The Blackboard Jungle*, with an eye towards examining both of these feminine presences in the text—that is, the feminine presence in the public setting of the school and in the private setting of the home. I believe that a consideration of how gender construction in the domestic sphere interacts with the gendered issues of teaching in the public sphere will broaden and deepen Keroes’ consideration of the “masculine anxieties and imperatives” witnessed in Rick Dadier.

Unlike Keroes, I will base my discussion on the printed text, because the novel grants an even larger portion of narrative time to depictions of Rick's wife, Anne, and their soon-to-be-started family.

What these depictions reveal, I will argue, is that Rick finds himself in somewhat of a "no-man's land," struggling to find his place in spaces that are traditionally gendered as feminine. It is true that the 1950's are often presented in late-century textbooks as the decade of domestic tranquility, or at least stability. The war was won. Foreign tyrants had been conquered by the forces of Western democracy. The boys had come home from the front. Mr. Cleaver reassumed his "natural" position in the American workforce, and Mrs. Cleaver reassumed hers in the home. Yet, as Keroes notes, though women who had entered traditionally male workforces during the war were returning back to "their domestic places," "they still represented a very real danger—if not the threat of smothering 'momism' . . . then the more unsettling and very real possibility that they might refuse to remain complacently domesticated (if ever they were so) for very much longer" (55). If women were threatening to leave their places in the home, it only stands to reason that men might be left with the necessity of assuming greater responsibility and participation in domestic affairs. In other words, as women were beginning to navigate the new territory of "the public world," men were needing to negotiate a new place in the domestic realm, as well.

Rick Dadier is presented as a man with highly ambivalent feelings about this new blurring of gendered roles and spaces. He yearns to participate fully in the nurturing, generative duties of both teaching and parenting, yet at the same time he fears being viewed as womanish or motherly. His response, then, is to deny any blurring of gender

boundaries or stereotypes; he vigorously strives to prove that he meets the conventional measures of masculinity through competition, dominance, and control. To create a setting where these measures are available to its protagonist, the text falls back on a strict reassertion of traditional cultural boundaries: between the domestic and the public, between the teacher and the student, and between the “good” virginal woman and the sexual temptress. Thus, it seems that the text proves incapable of admitting any real potential for gender ambiguity, either in the public or the domestic sphere. The result, finally, is a narrative that “protests too much” in its masking of male anxieties.

Perhaps the most obvious way in which the novel poses a potential challenge to conventional gender demarcations is through its presentation of public schoolteaching as an extension of the domestic sphere. Often, efforts to draw definitive lines between public, masculine spaces and private, feminine spaces rest on an idealization of domestic space as a warm, insular, secure place of familial bonding, and a characterization of public space as dangerous, threatening, and sometimes violent. Interestingly, the space of North Manual Trades is alternately described in both terms, so that in *The Blackboard Jungle*, the physical space of the school proves to be a very ambiguous one for its teachers. On the one hand, it is portrayed as an extension of the sheltered, comforting, familiar space of the home. For instance, when Rick and his colleague, Josh Edwards, leave school one afternoon, they pass a group of students loitering in the school courtyard. Josh glances at them and remarks, “They can’t bear to leave the place. It’s like home to them” (108). Rick’s classroom, too, becomes “like home” to him. One afternoon, about two months into the school year, he waits for his class to arrive, and describes his teaching space in the following terms:

The classroom felt warm, and he watched the falling snow outside the wide windows, and he felt peculiarly cozy, even though he was waiting for 55-206. The world outside was very white and very quiet. He studied it from the warmth of his wood and glass and concrete cocoon, watching the flurry of snow, seeing the white flakes lap soundlessly at the windowpanes, cling there for a moment, and then fall away. (128-29)

This idealized description of Rick's classroom very closely mirrors conventional, nostalgic descriptions of home: the quiet escape from the harsh world outside, the "cocoon" that protects its inhabitants from harm.

The faculty lunchroom is described in similar terms: "Rick sat and listened while Solly expounded his theory. He sat and listened, and the room felt very warm and very secure . . . He sat and listened, and he was very happy here with these other men in the lunchroom, hearing Solly talk" (319). This emphasis on sitting and listening in a warm circle of intimate familiars evokes images of gathering around the hearth, or some other such activity of domestic instruction or edification. It is interesting to note that, though there are women on the North Manual Trades teaching staff, this faculty lunchroom is specifically designated as men's only. (The text never reveals where the women teachers *are* allowed to eat.) Nevertheless, the lack of women's presence in this space does not negate its distinct association with the (traditionally) feminine space of the home.

Indeed, the space of the school is further likened to domestic space through frequent analogies between teaching and the work of housekeeping and maternal parenting. This association is one that Rick seems intensely aware of, as he frequently draws parallels between the activities of his job and the activities of the home. For instance, early in his tenure at North Manual Trades, he speculates about what goes on inside the heads of his students:

Probably nothing. Zero. Perfect vacuum.  
*This is a job for a man with a vacuum cleaner*, he mused.  
How do you go about cleaning a vacuum? Do vacuums get dirty? How do you  
get inside a vacuum to begin with? (italics in original, 101)

Rick's musing that teaching is "a job for a man with a vacuum cleaner" is conveyed with a certain tongue-in-cheek irony. Rick, like the readers of the novel, recognizes the oddity of the image he creates—the "man with a vacuum" certainly was *not* a stock figure in newspaper, journal, or magazine advertisements of the time. Thus, his subsequent series of questions regarding the nature of vacuums only underscores Rick's unfamiliarity with affairs of domestic maintenance. If teaching is like housework, Rick seems to realize, then he has a lot to learn.

Rick expresses a similar insecurity in regards to his unfamiliarity with and inaccessibility to the act of maternal parenting, another distinctly feminine enterprise often enacted within the domestic sphere. For instance, when his wife goes into labor, the hospital staff will not allow him into the delivery room.<sup>2</sup> Instead, "[a]ll he could do was pace under the big chandelier that dominated the ceiling of the [waiting] room" (291). Here, like so many other instances in the book, the text accents the literal, physical boundaries between men's and women's spaces. Rick himself acknowledges that much of his anxiety stems from a lack of direct, experiential knowledge of women's experience of mothering; indeed he envies his wife's mother "for being a woman because she knew what it was all about, and he knew only the worry and the strain and fear bred of ignorance" (289).

Rick's recognition that he is cut off from the space where some of the most directly generative activities of parenting takes place is significant in terms of his

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<sup>2</sup> Disallowing fathers from the delivery room during the birthing procedure was standard practice at this



approach to his career and his perceptions of schoolteaching, for at one point in the novel, he explicitly links teaching to mothering. He describes his motivations for becoming a teacher in these terms:<sup>3</sup>

He held no illusions about his own capabilities. He could not paint, or write, or compose, or sculpt, or philosophize deeply, or design tall buildings. He could contribute nothing to the world creatively, and this had been a disappointment to him until he'd realized he could be a big creator by teaching. For here were minds to be sculptured, here were ideas to be painted, here were lives to shape. [. . .] Women, he had reflected, had no such problem. Creation had been given to them as a gift, and a woman was self-sufficient within her own creative shell. A man needed more, which perhaps was one reason why a woman could never understand a man's concern for the job he had to do. (144)

Insofar as they are both creative, generative activities, Rick explains, teaching is a parallel to, or an extension of, the act of mothering from which he is excluded. Unable to participate in mothering in a direct way, Rick sees teaching as an opportunity to act as a surrogate mother, of sorts.

In all of these ways, *The Blackboard Jungle* presents teaching as an endeavor closely tied to the activities of the domestic sphere. Yet, as I will further argue later, neither Rick nor his colleagues view this association with the home as entirely positive. He does, after all, exhibit a certain anxiety over his unfamiliarity with how to handle the “domestic” tasks with which he’s presented—a rather constant fear of inadequacy, it seems. Indeed, the male teachers’ entrance into the unfamiliar terrain of such a “feminine” space proves to be fraught with many problems, not the least of which is a threat to their sense of masculinity.

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time.

<sup>3</sup> Insofar as Rick’s motivations for teaching are here presented in largely negative terms (“he *could not* paint”; “he could contribute *nothing*”), this passage is reminiscent of the well-known saying, “Those who can, do, those who can’t, teach.”

There is certainly statistical data to support the notion that at the time this novel was written, public schoolteaching would commonly be seen as “women’s work.” Though in the colonial period and the early days of mandatory public education, schoolteaching was largely in the hands of male schoolmasters, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a steady rise in the number of women teachers in the public schools. In the 40-year period between the 1879-80 and the 1919-20 school years, the proportion of female teachers increased 29%, until women comprised 86% of the total teaching population<sup>4</sup> (Snyder 28). This percentage dropped slightly in the ensuing two decades, but rose back to the “85 percent level during World War II, when many young men left their positions to enter the military” (Snyder 28). Along with 1920, then, 1945 and ‘46 saw the greatest peak in the proportion of women in the elementary and secondary school teaching force. Thus it seems little stretch to imagine that *The Blackboard Jungle*, published not ten years later, might be a response to what was seen as the “feminization” of the profession.<sup>5</sup>

In Hunter’s narrative, this response takes the form of hyper-masculinizing the public school setting in order to conceal the male teaching staff’s fundamental anxiety about being engaged in “women’s work.” Even in the very first scene of the novel, Hunter seems to put forth the notion that the dangerous, jungle-like world of this all-boys’ vocational high school is no space for women—or even for aspects of the feminine.

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<sup>4</sup> It is true that in the decade following World War II, the teaching workforce, like countless others, witnessed the return of many male veterans who had left their posts to fight in the war. From the 1945-46 school year, when 138,000 men were employed as classroom teachers in public elementary and secondary schools, to the 1955-56 school year, one decade later, the number of men so employed had grown to 299,000, an increase of 117 percent. Yet these men still found themselves in a minority, comprising only 26% of the total number of classroom teachers in 1955-56. So although the number of male teachers in public elementary and secondary schools rose dramatically in the decade following the end of the war, these men still found themselves in a profession dominated by women (Snyder 47).

<sup>5</sup> See Ann Douglas’ *The Feminization of American Culture*.

The first chapter begins with Rick's interview for the position of classroom English teacher. As he waits in the general office, he meets Jerry, an old high school buddy, also waiting to be interviewed for the same position. In the two pages that detail this encounter, Rick notes repeatedly how "mildly" Jerry speaks, and remembers what a nice, even-tempered person he always was in high school. The narrator also notes on eleven separate occasions that Jerry is "smiling." As Ann M. Trousdale has noted in her study of portrayals of schoolteachers in children's picture books, "a smile, as it is often unconsciously practiced by females, . . . signifies a lack of threat that may be interpreted as a submissive attitude, a desire to please" (207).<sup>6</sup> In essence, then, Jerry is portrayed as extremely feminine (which seems to mean insufficiently threatening), which makes him, according to Rick, a sure non-candidate for the job: "He wanted to stop talking about the job because Jerry was such a hell of a nice guy, mild and even-tempered, and vocational schools didn't want nice guys who were mild and even-tempered" (14-15).

Rick's assessment proves to be correct, and Jerry loses the position to his old, apparently more masculine, friend. In fact, in an otherwise-undistinguished interview, it is only those traits that are most masculine that seem to impress Mr. Stanley, the chair of the English department who is conducting the interview. The first time that he is visibly "pleased," for instance, is the moment when Rick reveals that he is a Navy veteran. And finally cinching the interview is Rick's quotation of the "Once more unto the breach, dear

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<sup>6</sup> Trousdale examined 47 picture books for children, each of which centered around the story of a schoolteacher. 41 of these books featured women teachers, whom, Trousdale discovered, did not fit into any particular physical stereotype. Yet she did find one common feature: "The only characteristic common to the female teachers who are given positive treatment is that they smile. They smile *a lot*. They smile almost continuously at their students" (206). In contrast, the 6 male teachers portrayed in these books do not "constantly show their teeth": "In these books, male teachers who are treated positively are well disposed toward their students and are at ease with them, but they do not smile at them constantly" (207).

friends” soliloquy, which exhorts that in the face of war, true men must “imitate the action of the tiger” (17-18).

Yet if Jerry was slightly *too* feminine for this high school, it was only because his presence might have exposed to the other male teachers those feminine aspects of themselves of which they were afraid or ashamed. Indeed, the text is quite overt in illustrating the degree to which the men at this school are woman-like, for it frequently highlights the occurrence of feminine traits among the male teaching staff. For example, in the scene described above, the narrator notes that Rick has a “sibilant S,” which he consciously strains to correct during his interview with Mr. Stanley—lest Rick be perceived as overly feminine (17). Furthermore, Rick must admit that he graduated from Hunter College, traditionally an all-girls’ school. He hastens to explain, though, “They took in veterans after the war. It was difficult to find a school, so many of us were returning at once” (17). Here, Rick seems to feel compelled not only to mask his feminine characteristics, but also to deny any suggestion that he might feel too “at home” in women’s spaces; to rescue a threatened masculinity, then, he reasserts his status as a Navy veteran.

It is not only Rick who is painted as slightly “womanish,” however; virtually all members of the almost exclusively male teaching staff of North Manual Trades High are tagged with some distinctive feminine feature. Mr. Stanley, the chairman of the English department, though he was sufficiently tough and intimidating in Rick’s initial interview, nevertheless has an “almost feminine mouth” (32), and when he leads all the new English teachers into the pre-semester organizational meeting, he seats them “with all the maternal care of a mother hen” (27). Another young teacher whom Rick befriends is

described as “a tall, handsome boy, with . . . a perfect nose, high cheekbones, and sculptured, almost feminine lips” (64). And Josh Edwards, another new English teacher, is “small and meek-looking,” with “a smile on his round, wide face” (39). I would argue that the text’s persistent attendance to the feminine qualities of the male teachers betrays a certain anxiety over the fact that men’s positions as public school teachers automatically placed them in a space that had come to be regarded as “feminine.”

Indeed, even the students recognize (and exploit) the gender dynamics of male teachers entering a “woman’s profession.” At the first-week-of-school assembly designed to introduce them to the man who had been named their new principal, the students eye the newcomer with obvious reservation: “It was always rough when a new man hopped in the principal’s chair. It was like a woman marrying an alcoholic, gambling, lying, screwing drug addict. Right away came the reforms” (88). Invoked in their simile, of course, is the familiar cultural trope of woman as civilizing, domesticating influence on unruly man, a refrain most commonly heard in relation to marriage and family but here extended to public school work, as well. In this way, the text seems to be playing with the idea of domestication, which connotes two activities similar in intent, but slightly different both in ends and in means.

On the one hand, domestication can be targeted at a person as an activity of refining, cultivating, or edifying, of bringing a subject into accordance with the moral principles and civil codes agreed upon by a living community. Even before the days of Coventry Patmore, of course, the duties of this sort of domestication traditionally fell to women. The “angel in the house” was to train the children—and their father—in the ways of right, moral conduct and proper, civil behavior. In the other sense of

domestication, the target of the training is typically an animal that is to be brought from a state of natural wildness into a state of submission to a human master. In the cultural imagination and cultural practice of the West, such taming of wild beasts has been gendered masculine, for it rests on the exercise of power and domination.

This novel, then, evokes both senses of domestication, for portrayed in it is a student body that is simultaneously human Subject and inhuman Beast. The shifting significance of this term thus seems to parallel, and in fact produce, Rick's ambiguous feelings about assuming a role in the "woman's space" of teaching and "mothering." On the one hand, the text does seem to recognize that the "angel in the house," through her moralizing influence, did command a certain amount of cultural power. As Keroes notes,

Victorian culture in America and in England cherished (and insisted on) the rise of domesticity, a cultural move that kept women confined at the same time that it afforded them considerable power over family, school, and religion. Arbiters of social, emotional, and, above all, moral life, women were instrumental in defining virtuous behavior. (55)

Perhaps envious of this form of power, Rick imagines the school as an acceptable public site where men might be able to carry similar influence. He speaks of wanting desperately to "reach" the kids, the ones who "longed to be reached," and he observes of his effort, "It was almost fantastic, and he doubted if he could have explained his problem to anyone but Anne" (216).

Yet the text is unable to sustain its imagination of a public space where a man might acceptably act as an agent of moral change in the same way that a woman might in the home. As a result, the text falls back on the other sense of domestication, the taming of wild beasts, to legitimate and compensate for the male teacher's participation in "women's work." The reader is led to imagine the contemporary public education

classroom as a heart of darkness lying in our own American neighborhoods. The narrator's voice, when it is focalized through the students, serves to construct the students as a univocal, monolithic, barbarous presence. The first time that students actually show up in the novel—at the first-day-of-school assembly, two and a half chapters into the narrative—they are immediately portrayed as unruly, unprincipled, and disobedient. While the Superintendent of Schools is testing the sound equipment, a disruptive shout from a student at the back of the auditorium starts “a series of shouts, cries, laughter, and catcalls which Rick felt would soon get out of hand unless somebody took control of the situation” (42). Two aspects of this passage seem particularly significant. First, before any student at Manual Trades is introduced as an individual, the boys are presented as an aggregate whole, a literal student Body singularly characterized by its lack of discipline. Secondly, this undisciplined Body is immediately marked by its need for someone to “take control” of it, as if to suggest that the students of this high school are literally incapable of self-restraint.

Both of these characteristics of the student Body are reinforced a few pages later, when a new, young female teacher, Miss Hammond, is introduced to the assembly: “a loud wolf call whistle arose from the several thousand throats simultaneously” (44). Again, the students seem to have a collective, mob-like quality, and here, they are particularly unable to restrain from displaying signs of sexual aggression in the presence of an attractive woman. And if these displays were not enough to render the students as a singular, savage entity, as Miss Hammond struggles to regain her composure, the narrator even comments (again, in the voice of the students), “This was grand! Let's just sit here all day and have laughs at this piecy new English twat” (45). As if to strengthen the

depiction of these students as deserving and demanding of control, then, the passage falls back on paternalistic notions of “protecting the women” from the unruly sexual advances of adolescent boys. Indeed, when Solly Klein, one of Rick’s colleagues, offers his analysis of why vocational schools were developed in the first place, he says that the “bastard” who invented the vocational system did so so that “his wife and daughter can walk the streets without getting raped” (67).

Thus *The Blackboard Jungle* presents the students of North Manual Trades High School as a presence united in its unruliness. Moreover, as the un-noble savage, the student Body is one that lacks regard for conventional, recognized forms of authority. During the get-to-know-you assembly in the first week of school, they immediately reject the new principal with a vehemence that seems a little overstated, even for rebellious teenagers:

The kids disliked him instantly. Their worst fears were realized the minute he opened his big yap. He was, the bastard, a reformer, and they needed a reformer like they needed a hole in the head.

He gave them the usual reform pitch, the one all the new jerks gave, only he sounded as if he meant it. He sounded, in fact, as if he dared anyone to doubt that he meant it. This was not good at all. This was miserable. This was a bad way to start out. How were you supposed to enjoy school when you got a guy like this one for principal? How were you supposed to learn anything? (88-89)

With such overt disregard for traditional, sanctioned authority, this student Body is painted as one that is to be feared, so that when the principal issues a “dare” to challenge him, it can be viewed as merely the necessary step in reigning in potential disruptions to the established order. I would argue, then, that—normal teenage challenge to authority notwithstanding—passages such as these establish and exaggerate the student presence as a grave menace in need of being broken, subdued, and mastered.



Of course, the title of the novel itself underscores and sustains this notion of the unruly student Body in need of (masculine) domestication. The image derives from a passage where Rick is bemoaning his lack of adequate teacher training and preparation. The portrait of the students he draws in his imagination is as exaggerated as many of the descriptions above:

Why prepare a teacher for an altogether different type of student, an ideal student, and then throw him into a jungle hemmed in by blackboards and hope he can avoid the claws and the teeth? If the teacher survives, well all fine and dandy. If he doesn't, the wild animals will surely survive, won't they? But who wants wild animals in the street? (141)

In this way, the novel's portrayal of the boys at North Manual Trades encourages the reader to accept that if any pupils were ever in need of panoptic supervision, these are, for this student Body is far from docile. In short, the text asks us to agree, students such as these must be domesticated in the *masculine* sense of the word, and only "real men," it seems to suggest, would be up to the task.

This fear of becoming too woman-like later takes on a very literal dimension for Rick. In several instances, the depiction of the students as a body in need of a masculine controlling presence is accompanied by a comparison to masculine sexual conquest. Most obvious is Rick's first day of teaching. He begins the school day by barking at his students, brusquely ordering them to follow him silently from the gymnasium, where they had originally gathered, to their classroom. When they obey and follow him silently, he's excited by his ability to exact control over the situation. He then compares his first day of teaching to a night back in college when he had "planned the seduction of Fran Oresschi. Exactly like that night, that payoff night, when he would find out if his plans would succeed or not. Just like that, only without any of the slyness or the feeling of

conspiracy” (47). Successfully mastering his class, then, was as much a test of his manhood as his ability to masterfully seduce a woman.

In one of the most pivotal scenes of the novel, however, a group of seven students challenges Rick on both counts. They set out to exact revenge on their teacher as retribution for a crime they believed he committed against one of their peers. Earlier in the novel, Rick discovers a student attempting to rape Miss Hammond in an empty stairwell, and steps in to stop the attack. The student is expelled and, it is suggested, sentenced to time in prison. The boys have come to see Rick’s intervention not only as meddling, but even as treacherous, a betrayal of the bond of masculinity, for in their eyes, the student was only seeking an outlet for “natural” male desires and aggressions. The “poor bastard” was simply trying to “cop a feel” (89). (The students’ language here seems exaggerated to me, as well—an additional attempt to construct the student body as some wild, savage presence.)

In order to punish Dadier for “stepp[ing] in and ma[king] like a goddamned hero” (89), this gang of students follows Rick after school one day when he goes to have a drink with Josh Edwards. The boys lie in wait outside the bar and then ambush both teachers in a dark alleyway. In this scene of brutal physical violence, it is telling that the narrator repeatedly makes reference to the students’ attacks on Dadier’s groin: four mentions in a two-page description. By the end of the scene, the language of violent physical and sexual aggression are unmistakably evocative of rape, culminating in, “They gave it to him. They gave it to him until they felt they’d squashed his scrotum flat, and then they gave it to him equally around the head” (121). Thus, this fight both draws upon and exacerbates Rick’s fear of the feminine, for it is not only instigated by a perceived

lack of masculine brotherhood, it quite literally assaults a physical, bodily symbol of Dadier's masculinity. Even when the boys are actually complimentary of Rick's ability to fight, their praise is still limited to the realm of the feminine; they pin his arms to his side so that he can't swing any more, and note with admiration, "he could sure as hell struggle, even though he was bleeding like a whore on her legitimate day off" (121). Of course, the boys' intent here is to diminish their praise of Rick's fighting ability by comparing him to a woman—and not just any woman, but a menstruating woman, the most feminized (and therefore weak) of the species. The boy's ultimate punishment of Dadier, then, is to "feminize" him, to prove that both figuratively and literally, he has "no balls."

The attack seems to have had its desired effect, for when Rick gets back from the fight, Anne's description of him is much like Rick's description of Miss Hammond following the attempted rape. When Rick encounters the boy with Miss Hammond in the stairwell, he notes specifically "the torn front of her suit jacket, and the ripped blouse and lingerie. *My God*, he thought wildly, *that's her breast*" (83, italics in original). Later, hatred for Miss Hammond's attacker wells up in him as "he thought of the innocent exposure of [her] breast as he had seen it, full and round, the torn silk of her underwear framing it" (84). When he returns home on the night of the alley attack, there is a similar emphasis on a torn suit and an exposed, vulnerable chest—this time, his own:

His suit was torn, his new suit, the tweed he looked so well in, and there was a rip in his shirt, and she saw the flesh of his chest beneath that tear, and it was the sight of that skin, exposed-looking, white against the soiled white shirt, vulnerable-looking, that brought the tears again. (124)

In many ways, then, the attack on Rick *is* a symbolic rape, the boys carrying out to completion the act of violence that Rick had interrupted in the stairwell.

To extend the comparison further, Rick even uses the language of sexual violation to describe the scars on his face following his attack: “He felt like a pregnant woman wearing the badge of a bulging belly, the badge that proclaims to the world at large, ‘I’ve been layed’” (130). The passive construction of the sentence “I’ve been layed” suggests a lack of agency, power, and authority in the sexual encounter. Rick’s linking of the phrase to the scars he received from the attack suggests that he has now felt all too keenly the same passiveness that a woman might feel when physically forced to submit to masculine sexual aggression. He sees himself as “violated” in the same way that women are violated, even sexually. That a literal rape may not have taken place in the alley is immaterial; from the description of the attack itself to the descriptions of Rick in its aftermath, all textual evidence suggests that this scene is a symbolic emasculation of Rick, who is made more like Miss Hammond—that is, a victim of excessive masculine violence—than he is eager to admit. For the man who had already associated the act of controlling his students with the act of sexual conquest, the attack represents a fundamental challenge to his capacity to do either.

Rick’s manhood is again threatened when one of his most faithfully-attending students, Miller, is absent. Another student tells Rick that Miller is not in class because his sister was “knocked up,” “at a grind session” (170). The student challenges Rick, though, by smugly asking after each of these phrases if Rick is familiar with it, if he knows what it means. Rick loses control and gets into a proverbial “pissing match” with the student. He rants to himself:

The boys automatically assumed that an English teacher was some sort of sexless, neuter, unthinking, unfeeling, unaware person who knew only his textbooks. [. . .] He didn’t like West’s intimation that expressions like ‘knocked up’ and ‘grind session’ were foreign to him. He’d been a kid, too, and he’d flopped in whore

houses from Panama to Tokyo, and his manhood was somehow offended by West's implication. He realized that this was all a matter of masculine pride, but he could not control the urge to show West that he knew a few things about life, too. (170-71)

It's no coincidence, I think, that the first adjectives Rick objects to being tagged with are "sexless" and "neuter," given the threats to his masculinity already discussed above. And again, the phrase, "knocked up" reinforces women's sexual submission to men, and Rick seems somehow offended that West would suggest that he doesn't possess the knowledge of (and by extension, the capacity for) such sexual aggression and dominance.

Perhaps the most pointed—and most poignant—suggestion of Rick's figurative emasculation and lack of sexual potency, however, is encoded in the nickname that his students immediately confer upon him: "Daddy-O." Keroes rightly describes this phrase a "struttingly ironic but insistent naming of the paternal function he fulfills" (61). Yet this label is also an insistent naming of the paternal function he does *not* fulfill, a constant reminder that, in the most literal terms, he is a Daddy-0, a man *without* children. Rick remains acutely aware of this lack, as is evidenced when, in the late stages of Anne's pregnancy, one of his colleagues asks Rick how it feels to be a father. Rick replies, "Not yet. I'm not one yet" (117). Finally, his caution proves to be well-founded; he actually does fail to become a Daddy when his child is stillborn. While a stillbirth in no way indicates a lack of masculine sexual potency—in fact, failure to deliver a healthy child is more likely to be "blamed" on some negligence or physical disability of the *mother*—the fact remains that Rick continues to be a man without the children (particularly the male children) he feels are necessary to authorize his position in the home and to secure his future patrimonial line.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Anne notes that Rick "would have vastly preferred a son and heir" to a "daughter and heiress" (23).

There is thus a great deal of evidence of masculine anxiety depicted in *The Blackboard Jungle*, yet the narrative also attempts to contain and assuage that anxiety. I contend that the text's response to these male teachers' fear of becoming feminized is to reassert, and actually strengthen, the strict boundaries of gender conventions that might have been challenged by women's growing presence and power in the teaching profession. Especially stark become the divisions between the public sphere and the domestic sphere, and distinctions between the "good woman" and the "dark lady."

From the first time that the reader is introduced to the space of Rick's home and family, it is clear that in this novel, the domestic sphere is definitively marked as feminine, and therefore distinct from and inferior to the masculine sphere of the public workplace. The reader's first introduction to the Dadiers' domestic space is when Rick comes home to give his wife, Anne, the news that he's gotten the job at North Manual Trades. He opens the door with roses and champagne to celebrate his winning the position. When Anne sees him pull out the bottle, "she could read the delicately scripted *Domestic*, but that didn't matter to her at all" (22). So even here, we see how that which is domestic, affiliated with home, is somehow inferior and disappointing.

Anne's response is hardly surprising, though. In this text, as in many others at this time, the space of the domestic is delineated as an area where the tasks of food preparation, house cleaning, and general household maintenance fall almost exclusively to women. (The first time we even see Anne, she's standing at the sink, "with her hands in soapy water" [21].) And not only is the space of the home designated as *a* proper place for women in this novel, it is also designated as *the* proper place for women in this novel. In only two scenes in the entire novel does the reader see Anne leave the space of

the Dadier home: once to go to the market to buy food for an evening meal, and once to go to the hospital to deliver their child. Even when Rick first comes home with the news of having secured a job at North Manual Trades, he and Anne do not go out to dinner to celebrate together; instead, he brings dinner in—a seemingly insignificant detail, yet in the context noted above, with Anne so infrequently seen outside the home, one which resonates with particular force.

Indeed, as Rick leaves to pick up the take-out they've ordered, he exits with a bravado of masculine pride that is derived from his capacity to "provide for" his wife, who, it is implied, cannot or should not provide for herself: "Good! . . . I am going out for supper. I shall bring supper home to you as befits the wife of a new English teacher at North Manual Trades High School, Incorporated, of America" (23). The fact that Rick here likens the school to a corporation, a public workspace that women had not yet entered to the same degree that they had entered the space of the school, may be an additional indication of his desire to distance himself and his teaching from what might have been viewed as women's work. His bravado continues as, just before he leaves, he tells her to get dressed in her fine clothes, and set the table with the roses and brass candlesticks: "Hop to it, wench! I'll go get the vittles" (24). Though Rick is deliberately playful here with his exaggeration of gender stereotypes—wife as servile "wench" and husband as caveman-like gatherer of food—these stereotypes do prove to ring true as the text progresses. Indeed each instance like this one—where a logical occasion for Anne to enter the public realm is explicitly denied—serves to further the construction of the domestic sphere as the one and only "proper" sphere for women.

If the novel reasserts a traditional configuration of domestic space, it also falls back on a conventional characterization of public space, gendering it as masculine and therefore superior in its “usefulness.” And despite the aforementioned suggestions that North Manual Trades bears resemblance to the space of the home, the majority of the narrative seems to confirm that the space of the school rests squarely and solely in the realm of the public; in this way, the text resists any associations the school might have with the domestic in order to claim the school as a “man’s space.” For example, when the new principal, Mr. Small, gives his welcome and orientation speech to the faculty, he articulates his vision for the school in these terms:

When those kids come into this school on Monday morning, I want them to know immediately who is boss. The teacher is boss, and I want them to know that, because we are not running any goddamn nursery school but we are running a school that will teach these kids to be useful citizens of a goddamn fine community, and pardon my French, ladies, but that’s exactly the way I feel about it. (31)

Small’s apology here to the women in the audience<sup>8</sup> reinforces the notion that there are well-defined spaces where certain modes of “masculine” behavior—including foul speech, apparently—are acceptable. Thus, when Small excuses himself for cursing, he attempts to construct the space of this high school as a masculine space, resembling that of men’s clubs, after-dinner smoking rooms, and (until the twentieth century) other public workplaces. Excusing himself in this way then perpetuates the assumption that the presence of women in a public forum of work was an anomaly or a deviation from the norm, an assumption that, though it held true for this school, was (as we have seen) decidedly false when it came to the teaching profession as a whole.

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<sup>8</sup> There were four.



Also apparent in this passage is Small's need to distinguish the work that will be done in this vocational (i.e. "men's") school from the work that is done in nursery (or "women's") schools. In the context of education, the term "vocational" usually indicates a more "practical" as opposed to a strictly "academic" curriculum. Thus, Small can assure the teachers at North Manual Trades that they are helping to produce "useful citizens." (The fact that the students here are all boys only reinforces the notion that it is "natural" that men are the ones to go into the community to do "useful" work.) Of course implicit in Small's comparison is the notion that nursery schools produce "non-useful" citizens of the community. This degradation of the status of nursery schools surely rests in their association with the feminine. Since its very name is derived from a verb meaning "to suckle," or "to rear," duties that have traditionally fallen to women in the home, the nursery school *is* a public space that is closely aligned with the domestic. The implication, therefore, is that were male students to be held too long under the sway of "feminine" education, they would risk becoming too domesticated—or womanish—to perform "useful" service to the community. That Small feels compelled to distinguish for the members of his teaching staff the difference between "women's work" and the work that they perform at North Manual Trades High only serves as further evidence of the masculine anxiety over the feminization of the teaching profession.

Principal Small is not the only school official to betray this anxiety. On the first day of the new semester, the Superintendent of Schools reinforces a similar "us-against-them" division between the sexes. At the opening day assembly, he introduces all the new teachers to the classes to whom they've been assigned. When he calls upon Miss Hammond, he refers to her as the teacher who will "be takin' care of the other senior

boys” (44), a phrase which elicits great amusement from the student body, on whom the obvious *double entendre* is not lost. Rick (or the narrator—it is unclear whose voice is here assumed) speculates that “perhaps [his] choice of language was unintentional, or perhaps it was part of his pitch to the boys, the we’re-all-brothers-under-the-skin pitch, and I-know-your-problems-well, fellows” (44). Deliberate or not, the underlying message of the superintendent’s choice of words is the same: though Miss Hammond has broken through to the masculine space of the vocational school, it is not, nor will it be, *her* space to control or command (indeed, just the opposite, as his phrase suggests that her role at the school will be to satisfy the sexual desires of the males who *do* control the space). Like Principal Small’s comments, then, the superintendent’s words work to ward off the growing presence of women in the school, and to reassert North Manual Trades as a distinctly masculine workspace.

In a similar effort to explain away or dismiss women’s presence in the school, Rick also suggests that those women who have entered the teaching profession have not done so as true professionals, but as cowards. At one point in the middle of the novel, when he is feeling particularly dejected about the possibility of his students ever actually learning, he starts to question who to blame: the students for being so dumb? himself for not being better prepared? the board of education for not attracting and preparing better teachers? He then wonders about blaming the teachers themselves:

Or do you condemn the meatheads all over the world who drift into the teaching profession, drift into it because it offers a certain amount of paycheck-every-month security, vacation-every-summer luxury, or a certain amount of power, or a certain easy road when the other more difficult roads are so full of ruts?

Oh, he’d seen the meatheads, all right, he’d seen them in every education class he’d ever attended. The simpering female idiots who smiled and agreed with the instructor, who imparted vast knowledge gleaned from profound observations

made while sitting at the back of the classroom in some ideal high school in some ideal neighborhood while an ideal teacher taught ideal students. (143)

It is most telling that, despite the masculine connotation of the term “meatheads,” Rick specifically genders this class of shiftless teachers as “*female* idiots.” He is, of course, drawing upon the assumption that to be female is to crave security, to smile accommodatingly, and to be agreeable at all costs. If more and more women are becoming teachers, Rick seems to suggest, it is only out of their own weakness and desire for security. So, it stands to reason, they are not true, legitimate members of the public workforce, even if they are entering it in greater and greater numbers.

Yet after complaining about the female idiots, Rick adds an even more telling observation: “Or the men, who were perhaps the worst, the men who sometimes seemed a little embarrassed over having chosen the easy road, the road to security, the men who sometimes made a joke about the women, not realizing they themselves were poured from the same steaming cauldron of horse manure” (144). Herein lies the core of the issue for Rick, as well as the underlying driving force behind the gender dynamics in this novel. Being a woman is bad enough, “full of horse shit” as she is (as it is here suggested). Worse than that, however, is to be a man, but to be woman-like. For the male teachers of North Manual Trades, then, it is crucial that they vigorously define their workplace as masculine.

The message certainly isn’t lost on Josh Edwards, a teacher who suffered a number of abuses at the hands of his students (recall that he was targeted with Rick during the alley attack), and who ultimately resigns. When Rick protests his decision, Josh insists, “It’s the first few months that separate the men from the boys, Rick. I’m just a boy, I guess” (227). Too boyish—that is, too woman-like—for the masculine

world of this blackboard jungle, Josh is all but driven from the space of the school. Thus, even though at times the novel seems to recognize that a unique blurring of public and private spaces occurs in public school, most of its characterizations of North Manual Trades nevertheless serve to construct it as no place for women, thereby reasserting and strengthening conventional boundaries between the realm of the public and the domestic.

The sharp division between the public and private spheres so vigilantly maintained in this novel even evidences itself in the ways in which Rick and Anne characterize their respective lives and work. In an interesting metafictional turn, they both, at various points in the text, envision themselves as participants in a narrative—that is, they liken their “real lives” to generic roles that are configured according to conventions of different narrative forms. Rick sees himself as defined by the “hero” narrative, while Anne sees herself as a player in a domestic drama. For instance, on the night on which Rick is attacked in the alley, Anne, knowing nothing of his whereabouts, is beset with worry over the late hour of his return: “She wrung her hands together, stopped it when she felt like the heroine of a cheap melodrama, and then began pacing the floor, walking back and forth before the set table” (124). It seems telling that Anne is able to imagine her life only in the context of “cheap melodramas,” domestic fictions or soap-opera serials commonly held to be “women’s texts.” Indeed, her comparison serves to further solidify the boundaries that *The Blackboard Jungle* establishes around domestic space, suggesting that in narrative as in life, such space is the only rightful place for women.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> What might be even more telling, however, is Anne’s recognition of the degraded status of “women’s fictions” and her resistance to being linked to them: she *stops* wringing her hands because she does *not* want to resemble the heroine of a “cheap melodrama.” This resistance to being confined to a “woman’s

Rick, on the other hand, sees himself cast as the protagonist of a “hero” story, a role which typically involves publicly confronting and putting down an enemy, often through physical combat. Rick is very aware of being cast in this part, and he is (at least outwardly) resistant to it. For example, before school starts, he answers a colleague’s query about whether he anticipates having any “trouble with the boys” with the reply, “I doubt it . . . I’m just going to get up there and teach. Hell, I’m not looking to be a goddamned hero” (40). In fact, this refrain becomes one that he repeats throughout the novel. Yet I would argue that his outward insistence at not being labeled a public hero is a case of protesting too much, for his inner thoughts belie a much different attitude. We discover that Rick is especially aware of the hero narrative as it concerns teachers. After his first day of class, he compares his pedagogical success to perhaps the most famous “teacher-hero” of the century to date:

He had made a few mistakes, true, but on the whole he had done well. He had shown a tough exterior to the kids, and whereas tough teachers were not always loved, they were always respected. He was not particularly interested in being loved. Mr. Chips was a nice enough old man, but Rick was not ready to say good-by yet. He was interested in doing his job, and that job was teaching. (60)

Here, Rick seems to be resisting hero status not out of any sense of the reality of teaching, or even out of a sense of modesty, but out of the realization that the narrative hero to which teachers are most likely to be compared is “nice,” “old,” and “loved,”—and therefore de-masculinized. Mr. Chips’ teaching is also closely aligned with parenting and therefore, the domestic: he teaches in a residential school, invites his students into his home for tea, and refers to his students as his “boys” or “children” (Hilton 114). Rick, however, wants to resist this narrative type that links teachers’ activities to those of

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role” in a “woman’s text” leads precisely to the masculine fear betrayed in the rest of the novel—hence its attempt to deny evidence of women’s presence in and influence on the public arena of the school.

the domestic realm. Instead, he defines himself according to the traits of more conventional (and masculine) narrative “heroes”: “tough,” and not to be influenced by anything other than a detached, unfeeling pragmatism.

Thus, in his own mind, at least, Rick embraces that narrative course that he so vehemently denies in conversation with others. And by the end of the novel, he has indeed followed this course; he confronts and puts down an “enemy” student in physical combat. Interestingly, even after this show-down with the troublesome student, he maintains his belief that he’s no “hero.” Following the incident, Rick returns to the male-bonding space of the lunchroom to be pronounced by his colleagues as a “professional hero,” yet he again resists the label, claiming modestly, “No . . . I’m just a teacher” (319). His distinction here is apt, for we have come to see how in this novel, these two “types,” hero and teacher, cannot be equated or connected; the former is a masculine role to be played in the public sphere, while the latter is a feminine role to be played in the domestic sphere. And at this point, whether or not Rick accepts the *label* of the traditional “hero” is immaterial; he can comfortably claim to be “just a teacher” because he has already compensated for his participation in this feminine enterprise by following the narrative course of the public, masculine hero. Though he may be “just a teacher,” he certainly does not see himself as one acting in a “cheap melodrama”; Rick, whether he admits it or not, understands himself to be the brave hero conquering a savage jungle.

If *The Blackboard Jungle* responds to the challenge of women’s growing presence and power in the teaching profession by reasserting traditional gender conventions and strengthening strict boundaries between the public sphere and the domestic sphere, it similarly utilizes and bolsters the prevalent angel/whore dichotomy, which asserts that

women are either wholly moral and sexually pure, or wholly immoral and sexually promiscuous. By drawing upon and animating the common (yet equally restrictive) distinction between the “good woman” and the “dark lady,” the text successfully creates a disturbing antagonism between the two primary female characters: Rick’s wife, Anne, and his colleague at school, Lois Hammond (the victim of the attempted rape at the beginning of the novel). In this way, the “good woman,” who is of course Anne, can act as a feminine voice of disapprobation of women, like Lois, who “overstep their bounds,” either by entering the public workforce or publicly exhibiting sexual desire. For instance, when Anne and Rick discuss the rape incident, the narrator notes that Anne

had also exhibited a womanlike contempt for Miss Hammond, blaming her for not wearing sackcloth and ashes to a teaching job in a school like that. Even after Rick explained that Miss Hammond hadn’t been dressed flashily at all, Anne still held to the theory that no woman gets raped or nearly raped unless she’s looking for it. (91)

A reader could speculate on whether Anne is truly disapproving or actually jealous of Miss Hammond’s entry into the public sphere, but the fact that she wants Lois to wear “sackcloth and ashes,” the garb of religious repentance, certainly suggests that Anne, as one of the primary voices of moral consciousness in the novel, believes that a woman’s assumption of a “teaching job in a school like that” is a betrayal of some natural or moral order—something to be forgiven for.

Indeed, the presence of Anne’s voice as that of the “good woman’s” censure seems pivotal in the text’s portrayal of the profound power of gender boundaries. A *male* principal or superintendent’s apprehensiveness about women’s entrance into the teaching profession could easily be attributed to his fear of (or indignation at) women beginning to “invade his space.” For the distinction between gender roles to seem “natural” or

essential, the text needed a distinctly *feminine* voice expressing disapproval of Lois; in other words, the reproach becomes significantly more forcible when it is a woman herself who censures a “sister’s” entrance into the public workforce as a betrayal of her gender.

While Lois betrays the “natural” division of societal labor, she also betrays the moral code that stipulates women are to be sexually pure and passive. If Anne is established as the “angel in the house,” Lois is established as the sexual temptress. As such, she proves to be simply another test of Rick’s masculinity. True to the “whore” role she has been set up to occupy, she begins to make progressively more explicit advances towards Rick, until the point in the middle of the school year when she propositions him for an affair. Part of her tactics in trying to persuade him is to insinuate that he must not be fully male if he can resist her tempting body—especially during this time, late in Anne’s pregnancy, when sex with his wife is not an option. She calls him an “angel,” as if he must be other-worldly, because no “true” man of this world could resist her offer. When he does resist her, saying “I’m going home,” she responds, “‘Me, too. Homeward bound.’ She smiled and touched Rick’s arm. ‘Look Homeward, Angel’” (266). Lois tests Rick’s masculinity, then, by insinuating that it is *he* who is the sexually pure and non-desiring “angel in the house.”

Rick continues to resist, but the angel references finally begin to unnerve him:

She had an annoying knack of making him feel somehow unmanly. Sterile was the word, he supposed. As if he were behaving contrary to all the laws governing the sexual behavior of the human male as reported by, thank you, Dr. Kinsey. As if *not* accepting the gratuity were abnormal. As if a man with a wife in her ninth month should snatch at this opportunity. [. . .] What’s wrong with you, Rick? No blood? No hormones? No *cojones*?”(268, italics in original)

This passage strikes at the central gender issue in this novel: Rick, who came from a woman’s college, entered a woman’s profession, was figuratively raped, and is now



refusing a sexual proposal by a beautiful, “other” woman, is truly beginning to doubt if he has balls enough to call himself a man. Because the lines that distinguish his wife’s moral goodness from his colleague’s sexual impropriety are so starkly drawn—almost to the point that the two women are caricatures rather than characters—Rick can ultimately be “excused” for his resistance to the affair with Lois; she was simply too evil for a good guy like Rick. Yet while this division between Anne and Lois exonerates Rick from his failure to follow through on the affair, it also intensifies the disturbing schism (mentioned above) between the two women, suggesting that according to the social structures registered in this text, women must truly be either/or: either in their proper work and sexual spaces, or not. And finally, Rick’s resistance to the affair makes that much more urgent his need to pass the final test of his manhood: the violent show-down with his student enemy. As Keroes notes, “[E]ven with the women subordinated in their familiar places, their danger defused, the man must still prove he’s strong enough to ward off any hint of femininity that might dent the masculine armor” (62).

Perhaps the most fitting way to conclude my discussion of this novel is to return to the quote with which I began. Late in the novel—after he’s been attacked in the alley, after his friend Josh Edwards has quit his job, and after a particularly frustrating day of dealing with both his students and the school administrators—Rick reflects with considerable disheartenment on his decision to teach:

Why even try to reach them? Why not throw in the towel and sit with your fat ass tight to the cover of the garbage can? [. . .] Why not collect a teacher’s salary, and tuck the good vacations into your hip pocket, and all the while be an employee of the DSC?  
And you could forget all about being a man in addition. (217)

These desperate thoughts betray the crux of Rick's dilemma in this novel: it's difficult to be a schoolteacher and a man at the same time.

William Ayers, in his essay "A Teacher Ain't Nothin' But a Hero"<sup>10</sup> has claimed that *The Blackboard Jungle* "manages to exploit perfectly the tinny patriotism and surface smugness of its era while reflecting and, in a sense, prefiguring the underground conflicts and tensions about to burst to the surface" (Ayers 148). I will argue in Section II of this project that in certain teacher novels written not even a decade later, these "underground conflicts" finally do "burst to the surface," but I agree with Ayers that texts like *The Blackboard Jungle* attempt to contain these conflicts by vigorously reasserting conventional boundaries of domestic propriety. Unlike Ayers, however, I would suggest that the "domesticity" being outlined and maintained in this novel is primarily personal and familial, rather than national; it's the "good wife" and the "sacred sanctuary" of the home that our brave hero fights to preserve—if only to secure his own position opposite to and outside of them.

Yet comparable issues of domesticity in the national sense *are* similarly negotiated—and contained—in other teacher novels from this era; *Good Morning, Miss Dove* and *To Sir, With Love* are two such novels.

### ***Good Morning, Miss Dove***

*By her insistence upon even margins and correct posture  
and punctuality and industriousness, she told them, in effect,  
that though life was not easy, neither was it puzzling.  
You learned its unalterable laws. You respected them.  
You became equal to your task.  
Thus, you controlled your destiny.*

—from *Good Morning, Miss Dove*

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<sup>10</sup> Ayers here plays with the title of a popular adolescent novel, *A Hero Ain't Nothin' But a Sandwich*.

Like *The Blackboard Jungle*, Frances Gray Patton's *Good Morning, Miss Dove* (1954) and E. R. Braithwaite's *To Sir, With Love* (1959) represent potential challenges to the simplistic division between public and domestic spaces. Yet these texts, I would suggest, negotiate school space with the domestic space of the nation, rather than the domestic space of the home and family. Like Hunter's novel, these two also suggest a certain ambiguity or fluidity of the boundaries between "foreign" and domestic spaces, boundaries which are commonly assumed to have been starkly defined during this era. These texts admit some breaks in the lines between foreign and domestic, and thereby admit the possibility that those lines, if not necessarily "wrong," are at least problematic in their arbitrariness.

But also like *The Blackboard Jungle*, both of these novels<sup>11</sup> combat that possibility by vigorously reasserting the very assumptions about foreignness and domesticity that are subtly challenged by the subtexts of the narrative. And quite tellingly, they do so through the figure of the public schoolteacher. Both Miss Dove and Sir act as "gate-keepers," of sorts, maintaining the rigid cultural boundaries that have been erected between who's in and who's out of the dominant society. In other words, these novels dispense with the problematics of the foreign/domestic split by strengthening and validating the boundaries that define each sphere. The resulting narratives, therefore, are ones that implicitly realize the ethical dilemmas of using public schools and teachers as vehicles for "protecting the domestic interior," but that ultimately contain and mask that realization by adamantly declaring the virtues of the civilized homeland against the crudeness of the uncivilized, outside world.

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<sup>11</sup> *To Sir, With Love* was originally marketed as autobiography, though critics now tend to classify the text as a novel.

Before embarking on a discussion of Patton's text, it seems fitting to examine the historical context surrounding its publication, particularly the contemporary beliefs about the purposes of public education, and some of the cultural history that had led to those beliefs. Many late twentieth-century educational historians and curriculum theorists, such as Michael Apple in his 1979 study, *Ideology and Curriculum*, have argued that early educators and social scientists believed that one of the most compelling arguments for the creation of a public school system was the need for an institution that could effect social *homogeneity* in a diverse population. These founders of the American public education system saw schools as means for achieving among the disparate racial and ethnic groups of the American population a "melting pot" form of community—the kind of community they saw as essential to the maintenance of national safety and progress.

Apple argues that this notion became particularly powerful in the nineteenth century, a time when the American economy was shifting from an agrarian to an industrial base, when rural communities were dissipating into urban centers, increasingly populated with Eastern and Southern European immigrants, and when urban schools, which would serve as the models for public schools, were becoming increasingly common. He goes on to observe that the middle to late nineteenth century was also

a time of doubt and fear for the small farmers, merchants, and professionals who made up the nation's middle class. They felt their social order, which they viewed as being rooted in the small rural town with its deep, face to face personal relationships, was endangered. They were afraid of the emerging dominance of a new economic unit, the corporation. [. . .] But the growth of a corporate economy also was tied to the growth of urban centers. The cities were increasingly being populated by immigrants from eastern and southern Europe and Blacks from the rural South. These diverse people were seen as a threat to a homogeneous American culture, a culture centered in the small town and rooted in beliefs and attitudes of the middle class. The 'community' that the English and Protestant forebearers of this class had 'carved from a wilderness' seemed to be crumbling before an expanding urban and industrial society. (70-1)

I quote Apple at some length here, for his explanation of this attitude held in the formative years of public education calls attention to the task, very early assigned to the public school, of maintaining the distinction between insider and outsider, of protecting the homogeneous center of white, middle-class culture from the foreign influence of southern Blacks and southern European immigrants.<sup>12</sup>

It should be noted, of course, that this notion of maintaining a homogenous culture was not the only task envisioned by early proponents of universal public elementary school; others saw such a system as a means to eliminate poverty, reduce crime, and provide for a fundamental, natural human right of all people. Yet the preoccupation with protecting the homogenous “center” culture from foreign “contamination” was undeniably present in much nineteenth-century rhetoric surrounding the creation of public school systems. For example, in an 1849 lecture delivered to the American Institute of Instruction, Benjamin Labaree, President of Middlebury College in Vermont, asked the following question of the effect of immigrants on American society: “Shall these adopted citizens become a part of the body politic, and firm supporters of liberal institutions, or will they prove to our republic what the Goths and Huns were to the Roman Empire?” (cited in Butts and Cremin 192). Labaree’s choice of analogy here not only reinforces the division between foreign and domestic, but also furthers the notion that “foreign,” as a matter of course, equals destructive, barbaric, and uncivilized. The use of such rhetoric in an address by an educator to a body of educators and education administrators indicates the degree to which institutions of learning were preoccupied with a perceived responsibility of protecting the domestic interior.

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<sup>12</sup> For more on this topic, see B. J. Weiss’s *American Education and the European Immigrant: 1840-1940*.

And this protection, in the eyes of many, necessarily involved keeping insiders in, and outsiders out. Indeed, Apple cites urban historian Carl Kaestle, who wrote in *The Evolution of an Urban School System*:

Most schoolmen were probably not adverse to the success of limited numbers of the poor through education, but the schools' mission—and most promoters were quite frank about it—was to inculcate cooperative attitudes among the city's children whatever the vicissitudes of urban life might bring them. Acculturation is thus a more accurate term for the school's intention than assimilation, although the terms are often used synonymously. The schools reflected the attitude of the general native public, who wished to Americanize the habits, not the status, of the immigrant. (66)

This distinction between acculturation and assimilation is crucial to understanding the issue of domesticity versus foreignness in the novels examined here; acculturation, Kaestle notes, was essentially a vehicle for maintaining boundaries between insiders and outsiders, if only by schooling the outsiders themselves to respect those boundaries. Assimilation, on the other hand, would have granted immigrant students greater freedom to “border-cross” into the dominant culture, and was not, according to Kaestle, the primary intent of the school administrators and social scientists who were defining and solidifying the purposes of public school systems in the late nineteenth century.

What seems crucial here is that for much of the nineteenth-century American middle-class, from which founding social theorists and curriculum planners would emerge, the notion of “community” was equated with homogeneity. Such community was not perceived simply as a way to rescue the feel-good, down-home personal relations familiar to rural townspeople—a way for us (and the first person plural is certainly problematic here) to be “one big, happy family” again—it was seen as fundamental to the preservation of the nation's economic health. Indeed, as Apple concludes, “this unitary culture was not only the source of America's stability and a key to progress, but was

synonymous for these members of the intelligentsia with the idea of democracy itself” (71). In wide circulation at this time, then, was the notion that if “we” (the white middle class) can keep our communities consistent and static enough, progress and free life as “we” know it can continue uninterrupted and undisturbed.

This early mission to preserve a “unitary culture” is closely linked to the problematic task of “boundary maintenance” completed by the public schoolteachers in the novels examined here. Although I have to this point focused only on the early and middle nineteenth century as a time that witnessed a solidification of the belief that national progress largely depended on the public schools’ maintenance of a sharp division between a homogeneous domestic population, and a heterogeneous foreign one, it seems easily argued that this belief extended through the early and middle twentieth century, as well. If the nineteenth century saw a rise in the white, rural middle class’s fears of industrialization and urbanization (and the threat that these forces posed to their familiar, homogeneous culture), a similar state of large-scale cultural change, perceived as threatening to the white middle class, certainly followed the first world war. As educational historian Lawrence Cremin has argued, “When the divided allegiances of World War I raised to the forefront the question of immigrant loyalty, the pressure on the school to Americanize with renewed vigor and effectiveness achieved nationwide proportions” (Cremin, “Revolution,” 300). This demand for the public schools to “Americanize” its students extended well into the twentieth century, and was only intensified during the second world war and the ensuing postwar era. Indeed, one only need consider such national embarrassments as Japanese-American internment camps

and McCarthy trials as evidence that anxiety over a perceived diminishment in social homogeneity extended into this era.

Against such perceived threats to “community,” the white middle class often responded with efforts to assert, test, and prove the “sameness” of American culture, efforts which often permeated the theory and practice of public education. At the July 1949 convention of the National Education Association, for example, delegates affirmed the NEA’s previous decision that members of the United States Communist Party should not be teachers or members of the NEA: “Such membership, in the opinion of the Educational Policies Commission, involves adherence to doctrines and discipline completely inconsistent with the principles of freedom on which American education depends” (quoted in Butts and Cremin 552). Similarly, in 1954, the words “under God” were added to the Pledge of Allegiance, then regularly recited in most public schools, in order “to emphasize differences between American Judeo-Christian society and a godless Communism” (Biklen 114). And perhaps most indicative of this trend, looking only a few years past the publication of *Good Morning, Miss Dove*, was the Eisenhower administration’s 1958 National Defense of Education Act, an initiative enacted as a direct response to the Soviet launching of *Sputnik I*. That this act, an initiative designed to improve education in science, engineering, foreign languages, and mathematics, was born of a technological “defeat” by foreign rivals only further proves, as all these examples do, that the schools continued to be institutions seen by many as a primary cultural vehicle for protecting the domestic interior from foreign contamination and competition.

Indeed, Frances Gray Patton’s 1954 novel, *Good Morning, Miss Dove*, illustrates how the figure of the public schoolteacher was still being used to represent the



acculturating force that society often seems to expect education to be, especially during times of social upheaval. Patton's story of the tough-as-nails grade-school geography teacher, both feared and beloved by all who sat in her classroom, is largely the story of how one teacher, over the course of her twenty-five year tenure at the local elementary school, is able to unite her small community in an amazing like-minded sameness. (In fact, she was able to unite huge numbers of American readers in similar like-mindedness; because the book enjoyed such immense popular success—it was a Book-of-the-Month Club selection, an instant national bestseller, and a Christopher Award winner—Miss Dove became almost as beloved a figure among national readers as she was among her fictional students.) When she collapses in school one day with surging back pains and is sent immediately to the hospital for surgery, the whole town holds its collective breath as it waits to discover the fate of its single-most powerful force of constancy. Yet it is this very idea of the teacher as force of constancy that I hope to problematize here.

Before turning to the character of Miss Dove, however, it seems worthwhile to characterize Liberty Hill, the town in which she teaches. Of this community, I contend, the novel creates an idyll to small-town America and evokes a powerful nostalgia for the rural community that holds all beliefs and values in common—a type of community that, in point of fact, may never have existed in real-life America. Among those beliefs are a strong Judeo-Christian work ethic, and an unabashed belief in capitalism and bourgeois leisure. This is a town where the local ladies' bridge club meets weekly to play cards, drink hot coffee, and nibble on “patty shells filled with creamed chicken and—since the club was dieting—a dish of crystallized ginger in lieu of a heavy sweet” (144). It is also a town where the local Rotarians convene weekly to eat shrimp cocktail, drink out of

“goblets,” and discuss business matters (145-46). Finally, it is a town that, from all indications, is thoroughly white. Though the narrator never specifies the race of any of the characters, not one of the book’s illustrations depicts a non-white schoolchild or townspeople.<sup>13</sup> As a contemporary reviewer in the *New York Herald Tribune Book Review* concludes, the fictional Liberty Hill is a town “which retained the peacefulness and the homogeneity of American small towns in a less strident and chaotic era. Its residents were neighbors in a close and special way” (Wickenden 1). Evident in this remark, of course, is not only a powerful nostalgia, but an emphasis on homogeneity and proximity: the citizens of Liberty Hill are “neighbors in a close and special way.” In other words, they all reside safely in the center of the domestic interior.

Yet if the town is drawn as a domestic safe-haven, it is not shown to be one that will remain secure indefinitely. Indeed, the narrator suggests that the town has already begun to be threatened by other communities outside its own town limits: “Liberty Hill had long been affably incurious as to the world beyond its environs, but by 1916 the war in Europe had begun to trouble its composure. Vaguely, it felt that a vast portion of the earth that it had been wont to dismiss with the indifferent term “abroad” had become closer and more significant” (31). The very fact that the town is granted such a communal status that it can “feel” and “be troubled” as one singular entity (“it felt,” it had dismissed) again reveals the degree to which homogeneity and consensus of opinion are portrayed to be the foundations of the town’s blissful happiness. What this passage additionally reveals, however, is the degree to which that happiness is also dependent on

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<sup>13</sup> This aspect of the novel is thus in keeping with the observation of many race theorists, including Toni Morrison in *Playing in the Dark*, that unless otherwise specified, white is taken to be the “assumed” race of

ignoring and excluding communities outside of Liberty Hill, a task, it seems, that the town was finding increasingly difficult—until Miss Dove.

The first sentence in the dust jacket synopsis of the novel (found on a third printing edition), summarizes Miss Dove’s role in the community in this way:

The world is an uncertain place—yes, the people of the little town of Liberty Hill had heard a lot about that lately. But they had their own very special constant. [...] [E]veryone in the town had the inescapable and never-to-be forgotten experience of six years in her classroom—six years of proper posture, neat appearance, good manners and CONFORMITY as undeviating as her own rigid lines of latitude and longitude. [capitals in original]

As primary safeguard against the foreign influences of the dynamic and unfamiliar “outside world,” then, Liberty Hill has its faithful schoolmarm, who exacts regularity and consistency from both herself and her students. The fact that, in the whole synopsis, “conformity” is the only word spelled entirely in capital letters suggests that her ability to achieve homogeneity in a presumably “unruly” group of grade-schoolers was her highest and most valued duty as a teacher.

Indeed, I would argue that the figure of the teacher re-emerges in this novel as a potent enforcer of the homogenizing measures for which early public schools were largely believed to be responsible. This notion is certainly underscored in the description of the town and its citizens offered on the first page of the novel:

People born and raised [in Liberty Hill]—high and low, rich and poor—were neighbors in an irrevocable way, because their imaginations had been nursed on the same sights and sounds and legends and early ordeals. They had played in the same sunny fields . . . They had grown up hearing the same courthouse clock . . . They had all, for the space of a whole generation, been exposed at a tender and malleable age to the impartial justice, the adamantine regulations, and the gray, calm, neutral eyes of the same teacher—the terrible Miss Dove. (1)

The emphasis in this passage, of course, is the degree to which the experience of schooling under Miss Dove melds the various segments of society, “high and low, rich and poor,” into like-minded “neighbors.” The regulation of Miss Dove’s class is compared here to the regularity of the “courthouse clock,” suggesting not only the consistency and predictability of time itself—Old Mr. Porter even “checks his watch by her” as she passes on her way to school each day (6)—but also implicitly linking the “adamantine regulations” of the schoolroom to the security of “law and order” offered in the symbol of the courthouse. As Sari Knopf Biklen has noted in *School Work: Gender and the Cultural Construction of the Teacher*, “In a world framed by the kind of erosion of liberties represented by the House Committee on Un-American Activities, Liberty Hill and Miss Dove promise a kind of order that leans toward the fascist even as it employs the language of democracy. Miss Dove keeps people in line” (118).

Biklen’s final turn of phrase is remarkably appropriate, given the dual nature of the way that Miss Dove exacts conformity in her classroom. She does “keep people in line” in the sense of demanding orderly behavior and maintaining certain strict boundaries of propriety, an aspect of her pedagogy I will turn to shortly. But she also very literally “keeps people in line” as she teaches them geography, itself a science of boundaries and borders. In order to understand the way in which the figure of the teacher in this novel operates as a boundary-keeper between the domestic center and a foreign expanse, then, it seems especially appropriate to begin an examination of Miss Dove’s character with a consideration of her philosophy and handling of geography.

Perhaps the most interesting point to note in this regard is that when Miss Dove decides to become a teacher, she does so at the expense of being able to travel herself.

As a child, she had long been interested in reading of foreign lands and cultures, for her father “taught her languages and the geography of the earth, ancient and modern. He introduced her to the genre of rare travel books which he collected at great expense” (23). As much as she loved learning, however, she had never expressed any desire to become a teacher; she takes the job at the elementary school following her father’s death, which left her family in significant financial need. On two separate occasions, the narrator notes that this choice stole from Miss Dove time and energy that might otherwise have been spent on experiencing those foreign lands and cultures for herself: “She had been under twenty when she had begun to teach . . . She had embraced her profession with the singleness of purpose that she might, under other circumstances, have bestowed upon matrimony, or foreign travel, or carving in stone” (22); “In the accomplishment of these ends Miss Dove had denied herself much. She had ignored fashion. [. . .] She had dismissed her dreams of travel. She had renounced her youth” (34). Reminiscent of George Baily in *It’s A Wonderful Life*, Miss Dove forsakes her personal dreams of travel in order to dutifully pursue her teaching career.

What is telling here is that teaching and travelling seem to be presented as mutually exclusive. Of course, there were other, very practical factors preventing Miss Dove’s travels—namely a lack of financial resources. Her father, she discovers upon his death, had embezzled thousands of dollars from the bank of which he was president. She arranges with the new bank president to work at the school to pay off her father’s “loans” and thereby save his name from disgrace. Thus, she probably did not have the disposable income needed to embark on expensive foreign escapades. Yet the symbolic irony is not to be overlooked here. When Miss Dove, who read of foreign lands and dreamed of

travel as a girl, becomes a *teacher* of geography, those foreign lands begin to exist for her only in the abstract and not in the real. “Foreignness” thus gains an added dimension of distance in this classroom; far-away lands, climates, peoples, economies, and cultures are now something to speak of and talk about, but not something to experience for oneself. Furthermore, the static nature of the figure of the teacher is reinforced—never moving, never traveling from her place in the classroom. What the novel implicitly suggests, then, is that in choosing to teach, one must deny oneself the experience of foreign lands and cultures, only to permanently align with the domestic center of the classroom and the local community.

This notion is reinforced when Miss Dove begins to plan for her class in the months that precede the start of her teaching tenure: “The rest of that summer, while generals mapped their strategies in France, Miss Dove mapped hers in her bed-chamber. To represent a classroom she laid her father’s chessboard—an exquisite board of ebony inlaid with mother-of-pearl—on a table by the north window” (31). As Patton parallels Miss Dove’s pedagogical strategizing in her home with the generals’ military strategizing abroad, she subtly calls attention to the fact that because Miss Dove has elected to teach, she has located herself in a domestic space rather than a foreign one. Moreover, the stark contrast between the black and white squares of the chessboard suggests that the spatial lines drawn in this novel are to be respected as absolute and unmitigated.

Patton’s further description of Miss Dove’s practice with the chessboard prefigures another aspect of her geography lessons: the moral evaluations they imply.

So, as she talked to the little carven figures on the board, she introduced moral value into factual matter. By slight variations of tone, compressions of the lips, or nods of approval, she made it plain that to her certain forces of nature, beasts of the jungle, and formations of the land were more worthy than others. She was

partial to the yak which was “a useful animal”; she admired the domestic habits of bears and the cleanliness of cat creatures. Of ostriches who kicked, wolves who howled, monkeys who swung by their tails and chattered incessantly, she spoke with asperity. [. . .] She did not entirely approve of volcanoes: their action, she implied, was disruptive like the tantrums of a child. Rivers that overflowed their banks were rather silly. (32-33)

This passage demonstrates rather vividly that when Miss Dove teaches geography, she does so with the clear intent of illustrating some spaces as morally acceptable and others as morally diminished. And there is little left to wonder which spaces she values most: the animal traits she praises are usefulness, domesticity, and cleanliness—values typical of (though certainly not exclusive to) the Judeo-Christian bourgeois culture of Liberty Hill. Moreover, the elements of nature she disdains are those that won’t stay in their place, that erupt and spill into other spaces. In teaching geography in this way, then, Miss Dove teaches her students not only that their space of Liberty Hill is the best and morally superior community, but also that they would be foolish—and immoral, even—to attempt to disrupt the “natural” boundaries that separate their distinct community from others.

What I have already begun to discuss, of course, is the second sense in which Miss Dove “keeps people in line.” If Miss Dove teaches geography, a science of political and ecological boundaries, she also teaches propriety, a respect for social and cultural boundaries. In fact, it could be argued that discipline itself is her discipline, and that geography is but a secondary academic interest. The virtues she teaches are “respect for industry, desire for exactitude, and the civilizing grace of inhibition” (43), all of which can be discerned in her praise and condemnation of the various animals above, and all, as noted earlier, typical white, bourgeois, Judeo-Christian values. According to Miss Dove, postures are to be kept erect, voices are to be kept silent unless called upon, hands and

feet are to be kept inside desks, and clothes and hair are to be kept neat and orderly—in short, everything is to remain in its *rightful place*. And for Miss Dove, there is no ambiguity about which places are rightful and which places are not. For example, when she directs her class in the drawing of pictures, she gives them explicit instructions on how to proceed: “They left an inch-wide margin, measuring it with a ruler, around each picture. (Miss Dove believed in margins—except for error!)” (12-13). It comes as little surprise that Miss Dove “believes in margins,” because margins “keep things in line” and corral things into their rightful places. Indeed, through margins, outside, “foreign” spaces are kept buffered from inside, dominant ones.

A prime example of this effort to keep “foreign” ideas, customs, and values from infiltrating the domestic center of propriety is Miss Dove’s recollection of a former pupil, William Holloway. William was a child who came from a background “that might euphemistically have been described as ‘underprivileged.’ He was an orphan who lived with his grandmother, a woman of unsavory repute, in a leaky shack near the gas-works” (100). He is unkempt, barefoot, and bears the bruises and carriage of someone accustomed to physical labor or perhaps frequent fights. His house is described as “the squalid little house on the alley” (105). When he first enters her class, Miss Dove speculates that his presence in her classroom will be particularly difficult: “It was wearisome enough to deal with raw but scrubbed first-graders from decent families. An unwashed child from the criminal fringe of town posed a problem indeed” (101). Typical of her unceasing efforts to delineate between a morally upstanding domestic center and a morally inferior “foreignness” outside the perimeter of that center is the distinction she draws here between the “decent” families from the center of town and the families on the



“criminal fringe” of Liberty Hill. Moreover, her views are certainly shared, if not determined, by the citizens of Liberty Hill whose tax money is used to pay her salary. The response of a parent of one of William’s classmates is typical: “I believe in democracy . . . but I don’t want Charlie to catch anything!” (100). This sentiment echoes the distinction between acculturation and assimilation discussed above, and it typifies the “democratic” vision of schooling held by many of the white, upper-class dominant elite: it’s fine for others to receive education, so long as none of their person (or ideas, or culture, or knowledge) rubs off onto my children or their friends.

Interestingly, William is quite successful in Miss Dove’s classroom, for the singular reason that he tries desperately to please her by adhering to the boundaries of propriety she has established. He sits up straight, addresses her in crisp, articulate phrases (of course, only when spoken to), and begins to wear a clean, white handkerchief in the pocket of his grungy, threadbare overalls. So impressed is Miss Dove with William’s “progress” that she even inducts him into the culturally sanctioned world of adolescent employment: she gives him Saturday jobs doing yard work, and convinces him to take a paper route. Despite her efforts to acculturate him to the domestic center, however, she is saddened to learn that after moving from her elementary school, William wandered back into the space of the “criminal fringe”: “in a larger world than that of Cedar Grove [Elementary School], beset by temptations and not sustained by the classic simplicity of inflexible rights and wrongs, William had not done well” (105). Miss Dove’s reflections here on William’s fate serve as further evidence of her belief in rigid boundaries of propriety, “inflexible rights and wrongs,” as the means for achieving personal happiness and community stability. Instead of achieving this kind of happiness

and stability, Miss Dove is saddened to discover, William has committed such socially egregious atrocities as playing pool and shooting crap (getting arrested for the latter), and eventually dropping out of school.

Yet ultimately, Miss Dove's teachings prove to have a lasting effect on William, for in the end, he is re-aculturated to the values of the dominant domestic culture. Upon his grandmother's death in a gambling brawl (which Miss Dove finds *extremely* distasteful), William joins the army, serves for three years, is honorably discharged, and returns to Liberty Hill to complete his education and become a law enforcement officer. Miss Dove's approval of this turn of events is hardly surprising, given that in joining the military and the police, he has aligned himself with institutions that are as regulated and regulating as Miss Dove's classroom itself. He finds himself in a position, then, to carry on Miss Dove's work of protecting the domestic interior by keeping people in line.

Implicit in the very idea of protecting a domestic interior, of course, is the notion that there exists a literal, definable space that can and should be protected, and consequently, there is also a very literal, spatial sense in which Miss Dove regulates her students' behavior. She carefully manages the students' movement in the class, and dictates when they can and can't cross the imaginary boundaries she creates. For example, "She divided the second-grade into activity groups. [. . .] The groups did not talk among themselves, asking questions and pooling advice. They had no need to. Miss Dove had told them what to do" (13). In keeping the activity groups segregated, Miss Dove sends her class the implicit message that communities are strictly defined entities between which there is little need for communication or interaction. In this way, she subtly obscures the differences of opinion that surface within and between all

communities and also obscures the way in which communities are and must be inter-dependent.

Similarly, during a short reading time allotted to each class, each day, Miss Dove instructs the children to read a prescribed number of pages:

When the time was up they closed their books and listened while Miss Dove explained to them what they had just read. To read ahead—to go on, undirected, into the next chapter—was a graver misdemeanor than to fall behind. The latter was merely slothful; the former was impudent and dangerous. In such unguided sorties children were likely to collect odd impressions and form unsound opinions. (158-59)

Not only does Miss Dove restrict the students' opportunities to travel within the space of the classroom, she here limits their ability to travel beyond the physical boundaries of a prescribed number of pages in their textbooks. In this case, however, her purpose for such a restriction becomes even clearer: the students are to be prevented from collecting "odd impressions" and "unsound opinions"—thoughts, in other words, that have not been sanctioned by Miss Dove and the dominant culture she represents. In fact, this instance reveals both senses of Miss Dove's ability to "keep people in line"—the literal and the figurative sense—and perhaps nowhere in the novel is it better illustrated how these two senses work together to inform and reinforce one another. In controlling the physical spaces through which her students can move, Miss Dove simultaneously restricts the thoughts they are able to think, the ideas they are able to encounter, and the imagination they are able to cultivate. The classroom thus becomes a site where all kinds of impermeable boundaries are drawn, and the figure of the teacher emerges as the primary creator and enforcer of those boundaries.

According to many educational theorists, it is worth recalling, in many American classrooms the purpose of drawing such boundaries was to define and defend a

homogeneous domestic community. The degree to which Miss Dove is able to achieve such homogenizing measures might be inferred from a consideration of another significant component of her pedagogical approach: the leather ledger in which she records her one-letter assessment of each child at the end of the school year. (This volume is appropriately named her “Judgment Book,” suggesting that her prerogative both to set standards of appropriate behavior and to pronounce judgment of others’ adherence to those standards is tantamount to that of the Christian God on the “Day of Reckoning.”) In this ledger, Miss Dove does not utilize the traditional A through F grading scale, but instead invents new designations of her own. Acceptable in her estimation is the most common mark she awards, “T for Tractable,” and also favorable are the “number of W’s for Willing.” On the other hand, she regretfully hands out “some A’s for Awkward,” and also “a sprinkling of B’s—a really bad mark—which stood for Babyish.” Especially unsatisfactory, however, are the O’s: “O’s for Original went to unregulated children who formed ideas of their own without consulting Miss Dove, who decorated their maps with pictures of Viking ships off the coast of Denmark, or were disposed to argue points of philosophy. (O’s were not signs of Miss Dove’s esteem; she gave them regretfully...)” (103-04).

This Judgment Book reflects Miss Dove’s attempt to effect homogeneity on at least two levels. First, the fact that Miss Dove’s marks in the ledger represent evaluations of character (rather than academic performance) implies a belief that an individual’s personality is itself continuous or homogeneous enough to be summarized in one, all-encompassing adjective. Furthermore, the nature of the marks of which she disapproves clearly indicates that Miss Dove reserves her approval for those individuals who are

willing to align themselves with those beliefs and practices that the dominant culture holds in common. Favorable in Miss Dove's eyes are those "tractable" students who can be brought into the fold of the homogeneous community, but woe to the audacious "original" child who dares to exist outside of the margins that Miss Dove has so cleanly fixed and so fastidiously maintains.

Also unfavorable is the "C for Contentious," given to Angela Adams, whose favorite words had been "why" and "how"—words that could potentially challenge those margins and disrupt the community's status quo (114). In fact, so mistrustful of such contentiousness is Miss Dove that she even extends her wariness of Angela's behavior to Angela's son, who winds up serving as one of Miss Dove's physicians when she is taken into the hospital. Even though he had never sat in Miss Dove's classroom himself, he had heard his mother's stories of the teacher, and in an attempt to connect with his patient and put her at ease, he tells her of one of *his* most memorable teachers. He "grins reminiscently" as he recalls how one of his high school Latin teachers had warned him when he left for college: "'Good-by Adams. Don't get any new ideas!'" Yet "Miss Dove saw nothing funny in the Latin teacher's advice. She thought it shrewd and cogent and particularly sound for the son of Angela" (116-17). For a family with a tendency towards asking bothersome—and potentially disruptive—questions like "why" and "how," Miss Dove finds the Latin teacher's advice entirely "in line."

Indeed, preventing individuals from "getting any new ideas" is precisely the goal reflected in Miss Dove's Judgment Book. While this goal may seem fundamentally counter to the very idea of learning, and therefore the very idea of education, it becomes an altogether logical goal if one is trying to maintain a homogeneous dominant culture,

the duty often implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) handed to public schoolteachers like Miss Dove. It is true that this duty was being questioned in circles of educational debate during the years surrounding the publication of *Good Morning, Miss Dove*. In a 1957 address before the Conference on the American High School (reprinted in a 1958 edition of the *School Review*), for example, Henry Steel Commager, a University of Chicago professor of American studies, remonstrated:

At a time when almost all the institutions of society are in a conspiracy to suppress individuality and heterodoxy and eccentricity and to produce organization men and women, the schools, too, put the hobbyhorse away in the basement and organize group games, emphasize at every point . . . the virtues of conformity and adaptability in order to produce organization boys and girls. (9)

Though Commager is here critiquing such exaltation of “conformity and adaptability,” the very fact that he feels compelled to argue against these hobbyhorse-banishing schools is indication that classroom settings like Miss Dove’s were not uncommon at this time. In this historical context, then, it is easy to see how the aims of Miss Dove’s teaching fit squarely with those of other “institutions of society” whose aim it was to “suppress individuality and heterodoxy and eccentricity.” Indeed, what better way to produce “organization boys and girls” than to keep students from “getting new ideas”? Thus, “In the geography room [Miss Dove] drew the conclusions. She doled them out to her pupils who received them whole, without analysis, and wrote them down between even margins in their notebooks” (117-18). Through the bestowal of such definitive conclusions, Miss Dove successfully defines and defends a space recognizable as a domestic interior—and, as Biklen so accurately suggests, she “keeps people in line” within that space.

In fact, it could be argued that through Miss Dove’s definitive pronouncements and exacting teaching, her classroom is converted into a place that all Liberty Hill

citizens recognize as a comforting fixture of unity and consistency, for “in that room where no leeway was given to the personality, where a thing was black or white, right or wrong, polite or rude, simply because Miss Dove said it was, there was a curiously soothing quality” (11). As was noted above, no leeway is given to an individual’s personality because too many disparate personalities could potentially contaminate the homogeneous core of the community; personality itself—which is like community and “home” in that it is “familiar” rather than “foreign” —is discontinuous, fragmented, and contradictory. It threatens to disrupt a pattern of existence that, if repressive, is nevertheless comforting in its familiarity and predictability. I contend that this is why the townspeople and their children find Miss Dove’s regulations “soothing”: however rigid, exclusive, and repressive they may be, they further the comforting myth that definite boundaries exist and can be maintained between “home” and “abroad,” between “me” and “not me.” In this way, the geography classroom at Cedar Grove Elementary becomes a virtual “home-base,” a symbolic safe-haven for the children, parents, and townspeople of Liberty Hill.

Furthermore, as primary watch-guard of this safe-haven, Miss Dove herself becomes an agent of both constancy and stability, even outside the classroom. For example, she is single-handedly able to stop a run on the local bank in February, 1933. As frantic, panicked patrons are pushing in line to withdraw their hard assets, Miss Dove calmly walks to the front of the line to deposit her monthly paycheck. By the time she finishes her transaction, the closing hour has arrived and the bank is able to shut down for the day. By the next morning, public panic has subsided, and the bank is saved. In this scene, it is clear, the beloved teacher emerges as the super-human figure able to save

small towns in a single bound, the mere sight of her presence able to arrest anxiety and effect stability in the most unstable of times.

Similarly, when Miss Dove is awaiting surgery, two former students, “the parson and the cop” (“the cop” being the aforementioned William Holloway), wait outside the hospital, lest they be needed as blood donors. One of the doctors remarks that they make “an odd pair,” contrasting the clergyman’s pious and devout lifestyle with the policeman’s checkered past. Yet the lead surgeon, himself a former student of Miss Dove, responds, “Oh, I don’t know. They both grew up here in Liberty Hill. They went to the same school” (196). The surgeon’s response implies that the experience of Miss Dove’s class is the single-most powerful common denominator for most citizens of Liberty Hill, despite any other large-scale cultural differences that might exist between them. He confirms that Miss Dove’s classroom *is* a home-base, the unifying center of the community around which all other institutions and traditions revolve as secondary and subordinate cultural components. By maintaining definitive and unyielding boundaries around this home-base, boundaries which simultaneously exact unity within the base’s center and create “margins” around its “fringes,” Miss Dove is indeed the most valuable protector of the true “domestic interior” of the local community—and by extension, of the white, middle-class America of which the local community is representative.

If all of the above descriptions of Miss Dove and her pedagogical strategies suggest a rigorous effort at maintaining consistency and conformity, the narrative structure of the novel itself reflects a similar effort. Most notably, there are no chapter divisions. The scenes of the “present” narrative, Miss Dove’s illness and hospitalization in 1951, and the scenes of past events, from her childhood through her twenty-five years



of teaching, are flawlessly interwoven through integrated flashbacks. In this way, the entire 218-page novel becomes a singular, seamless flow of narrative. This technique achieves a sense of continuity in the audience's experience of reading the novel that parallels the continuity of the homogeneous community that is represented therein.

Similarly, Patton's tendency to refer to the same classroom incident several times over the course of the narrative seems designed to draw readers in, making them feel like they, too, shared the Liberty Hill children's "normalizing" experience of Miss Dove's class. Time and again, Patton refers briefly to an episode from the geography classroom, only to circle back around, pages later, to describe the episode in full. For instance, the reader first hears of a story about little Thomas Baker's drawing a picture of Miss Dove on the sidewalk in a letter that the adult Thomas writes to his little brother, Randy—a letter whose contents we read on page 136. Then on page 149, back in the future of the "present time" of Miss Dove's hospitalization, Thomas himself narrates the incident again, giving a full account of the episode. By this time, the reader already feels like she "knows" the story because of the earlier reference. She may think to herself, "Ah yes! Who could forget that time little Thomas drew the picture of Miss Dove on the sidewalk?" In this way, Patton slyly draws the reader into the homogeneous culture of all the students of Liberty Hill, for whom the experience of and stories from Miss Dove's classroom are "common knowledge." As one reviewer noted upon the novel's release, the narrative structure of the novel so deftly draws the reader into the world of Liberty Hill that Miss Dove becomes "so actual that it as though we, too, had once been privileged to sit in her classroom" (Wickenden 1). Like the absence of chapter breaks, this formal technique has the effect of acculturating the reader into a community where

thoughts and knowledge are held in common, and breaches of this commonality and the unity it produces are not to be suffered.

A final narrative strategy that works in this way, establishing the experience of Miss Dove's classroom as "normative," is point of view. The story is narrated by an unnamed third-person voice that can "see" into the thoughts, feelings, and motivations of almost all the novel's characters, including Miss Dove. In fact, the most interesting aspect of this voice is its remarkable resemblance to that of Miss Dove. The sentences are crisp, direct, and to the point. The diction is that of a proper schoolmarm: "Miss Dove chastized miscreants with her map-pointer" (46); "William was sensible" (107); "Alphonzo Dove, ordinarily impeccably groomed, was clad in a pair of trousers over a flannel nightshirt" (175). In the course of reading, then, it becomes easy to slip into the assumption that the story is narrated through Miss Dove's perspective.

Yet significantly, the narrative voice is *not* Miss Dove's. Its unmistakable resemblance to hers, however, might suggest that the narrating consciousness has already been indoctrinated into the realm of "proper" speech and values that she advocates and teaches; perhaps the narrator him/herself was one of Miss Dove's former pupils. In any case, aligning the narrator's voice with that of Miss Dove seems another way of establishing her beliefs as normative and standard. The all-knowing, all-seeing consciousness of the narrator, and therefore the consciousness of those characters s/he describes, all become focalized through Miss Dove's exacting value system and moral code. As a result, the reader is subtly yet powerfully led to evaluate the people and events of the novel through this focalized perspective; in other words, the reader, like the children in Miss Dove's geography classroom, has little opportunity to contextualize the

novel's contents through a frame of reference other than Miss Dove's. As the novel's dust jacket asserts, "You won't read far in this book before Miss Dove will become a part of your life, too." Thus, like the novel's seamless interweaving of present and past and its recurring references to "common knowledge" events, this narrative strategy also functions to draw the reader into the insular, homogeneous Liberty Hill community that Miss Dove is largely responsible for maintaining.

It seems clear, therefore, that the novel, in terms of form as well as content, works to establish Miss Dove as a character whose presence effects continuity and conformity from the communities in which she circulates. Moreover, this conformity, this ability to clearly define "us" from "not-us," is dependent upon disallowing "foreign" ideas and perspectives from infiltrating the domestic interior. Because she is the hero of the story—Liberty Hill citizens love her as much as they fear her—the narrative also implies that her homogenizing pedagogy is crucial to the community's welfare. Yet there is one scene, which is related in bits in pieces throughout the narrative, but is concentrated in the last 20 pages of the novel, that challenges all of these conclusions and serves to question, if not disrupt, many of the novel's earlier messages about the nature and value of establishing impermeable boundaries between communities. This scene occurs when Miss Dove is taken to the local hospital to undergo back surgery.

From the first moment she enters the hospital, there is an indication that her experience here may challenge many of her supposedly firmly-held beliefs. As she is wheeled into the building, the narrator observes, "In [the hospital's] atmosphere is some hypnotic or amnesiac quality before which ordinary life recedes. Even Miss Dove, with her high resistance to foreign influences, was affected by the spell" (88). The narrator's

choice of the phrase “foreign influences” in describing the setting of the hospital seems telling, almost foreshadowing that even the teacher so preoccupied with maintaining distinctions between “insider” and “outsider” communities can and will witness a blurring of foreign/domestic boundaries. Indeed, once she is admitted to the hospital and conducted to her room, she drowsily awaits examination. At this time, “she closed her eyes and let her mind bob up and down like a cork on the surface of a pond. She thought of pleasant, far-off things” (108). The image of a cork bobbing in water is another indication that she has now entered a liminal state, not hindered by boundaries. Her mechanisms for border-maintenance, so perfectly functioning in the classroom, are finally idle, so that the margins which she so insistently preserves can finally disintegrate, and she can “travel” beyond her very limited existence within the community of Liberty Hill.

Shortly thereafter, Miss Dove’s doctors arrive and determine that she must undergo a dangerous yet necessary operation, to be performed first thing in the morning. Thus, after supper that evening (a liminal time, it is worth noting, where day slips into night), Miss Dove is left to contemplate the prospect of her own mortality. In a very human moment, when she is reviewing the course of her life in light of the possibility of impending death, she begins to regret the degree to which she has repressed all of her desires for travel:

Pretending to read a magazine, she thought of the places . . . that she did long to see. [. . .] The white cliffs of Dover, the Lake Country, and all the green English countryside. Paris. Rome on its Seven Hills. [. . .] The Orient. The Arctic Circle. The Northwest Passage? In Miss Dove’s childhood that short route from east to west, though a lost cause to explorers, had still stirred the young with adventurous hope. She had planned to discover it herself when she grew up and the plan had never ceased haunting her. (186)

Only here, two-thirds into the course of the novel, is the reader allowed a glimpse of the toll that is exacted from such strict confinement within the borders of the domestic interior. The fact that Miss Dove is “haunted” by the loss of her dreams of travel and exploration suggests that she is intensely disappointed in the course of her teaching career, a disappointment that is in fact shocking, given her matter-of-fact confidence in her unyielding pedagogy throughout the early portions of the narrative.

Yet there seems to be something about being outside the confines of the schoolroom, in a space susceptible to “foreign influences,” that allows her both the literal and figurative room needed for reflection. In this “in-between” state in the hospital, she is able to step outside the boundaries of her own existence to reflect on her experiences more objectively. And indeed it is these very boundaries of her own existence to which her reflections turn; she even reveals that she is disappointed in the limitations of her own knowledge: “After her retirement she had meant to study Greek and geology. She had meant to learn more about the migratory habits of birds” (186-87). It is interesting to note that the subjects she had hoped to explore all have to do with different *places*: Greece, the center of the earth, the airwaves of the sky. For the first time, it seems, she allows herself to regret how stringently she kept people—including herself—“in line.” She laments: “How small and circumscribed her life had been! She had a great yearning to burst its bounds—to see, to admire, to be free!” (186). Miss Dove’s emphasis on boundaries in this passage—here, in the context of her own life—poignantly demonstrates that she, too, may have felt pressured to conform to certain expectations, particularly her community’s expectations of what schoolteachers should and should not be, what they should and should not do.

This suspended, liminal state that Miss Dove enters upon being admitted to the hospital later opens up into a full-fledged journey in which she is able to imaginatively travel beyond the boundaries of her schoolroom and Liberty Hill. This dream-like journey begins on the next morning, after she has been anesthetized for her back surgery. Doped with the “foreign” substances of medial narcotics, she feels as if she begins to float. Thus unlimited by the barriers of her own physicality, she embarks upon an imaginative excursion to all the places—planets, continents, cities—about which she had taught in her geography classroom, but never seen for herself. One of the most notable features of this excursion is not only that Miss Dove is finally able to cross the borders that separate the domestic interior from the foreign exterior, but that she becomes unable to recognize the very existence of such borders. For instance, in one moment, she finds that she is in “old Cathay,” and in the next, she finds herself in the desert, yet the transition between the two is both fluid and instantaneous: “even as she spoke she saw that the scene had changed. She must have crossed the wall without noticing” (202-03). Likewise, once she is in the desert, she compares its landscape to the “sand-table desert” that the third graders always construct at the beginning of her unit on Arabia. The difference that she notes, though, is that “no table could begin to suggest this sense of illimitable space, of vastness and emptiness stretching beyond the scope of the eye or the imagination” (204). Unable to sense any borders or boundaries surrounding the territories she visits, it seems she begins to realize that those barriers that separate “home” from “not-home” may be more artificial, and thus more permeable, than she once believed.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See Susan Stanford Friedman’s *Mappings* for an excellent discussion of the permeability of boundaries, specifically boundaries between the facets of identity. The book argues “for new ways of thinking that

As she moves beyond the geographical borders that surround the domestic center, she is also able to step outside of the restricting values and standards of the center's dominant culture, and therefore away from her own exacting, conforming impulses, as well. She notes that "she had entered a realm where ordinary laws—the laws of gravity and space and time [and propriety, I would add]—are not constant" (202). Her ability to exist in a realm with such lack of "constancy," particularly in laws that once seemed immutable, seems a very significant departure from the Miss Dove of the Cedar Grove geography classroom, given the degree to which she, in her person and in her pedagogy, had almost literally embodied constancy, conformity, and *lack* of change. In this new realm, however, she feels free to abandon her adherence to the boundaries of behavior she once rigidly maintained. For instance, under normal circumstances, she wears her long hair in a knot at the base of her neck, twisted "so tightly that the skin was strained at her temples" (29), and when she walks outdoors, she keeps her "black, small, straight-brimmed" hat "level and steady, upon her head" (47). Yet during her imaginative journey, as she is circling among the planets, "for an instant she let her hat take its chances while she reached out and nearly touched the Southern Cross" (206). She also feels an impulse "to loosen her hair and let it blow in the wind." These gestures indicate at least two newly-surfaced features of Miss Dove's personality: a lack of care for keeping things "in their place," and a willingness to relinquish a measure of control over the self.

Miss Dove becomes increasingly intoxicated with this new disregard for boundaries of geography and propriety, so that near the end of her journey "she was filled

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negotiate beyond the conventional boundaries between us and them, white and other, First World and Third World, men and women, oppressor and oppressed, fixity and fluidity" (Stanford Friedman 4).

with a desire to dance, to sing, to laugh. [. . .] She had discovered, she felt, some marvelous secret that prompted the pulse of the universe” (210-11). Upon this discovery, she imagines rushing back to her schoolroom in Cedar Grove to share her new insight with her colleagues and students. As she is returning, she continues to break rule upon rule: running in the streets of the town, racing through the school corridors, taking “a long, flying leap and [sliding] along the floor” (211). Yet when she gets back into the classroom, the children, who had been noisily playing, “rein in their joy” and silently fall into proper order. When Miss Dove asks for attention, “she meant her voice to ring, but it came out level and precise. She wanted to say to the children: ‘Unclasp your little hands! Forget the rules. A fig for margins!’ She wanted to tell them: ‘Look for the golden light and the new-veined leaf! Drink the air of Spring! Life is the only thing that matters at all. Life!’” (212). Of course, such sentiments and behavior run fully counter to “respect for industry, desire for exactitude, and the civilizing grace of inhibition,” the values she had so relentlessly admonished her students to maintain during her previous 25 years of teaching (43). Indeed, the fact that her voice comes out “level and precise,” even though she had intended it to “ring,” suggests the depth to which she has internalized her own admonitions in Foucauldian self-regulating fashion. Moreover, the fact that she “wants” to teach the children her new disregard for rules and margins suggests that she’s finally unable to do so. Even in this netherworld of boundless dream travel, then, Miss Dove is not able to completely shed 25 years of demanding conformity to the values and regulations of the dominant culture.

Nevertheless, this unusual scene in the hospital represents a significant interruption in the novel’s narrative arc. The joy and freedom that Miss Dove is able to



experience during her “travels,” unmatched in the rest of the novel, provides a critique of the conformity-exacting, homogenizing effect of the teacher so glorified and idealized throughout the rest of the narrative.<sup>15</sup> The critique is all the more powerful, moreover, because it is issued from the adult Miss Dove herself, and not from some plaintive student, merely restless due to childish desires or impulses. In fact, what the scene poignantly illustrates is Louis Althusser’s correct assertion in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” that “Schools and Churches use suitable methods of punishment, expulsion, selection, etc., to ‘discipline’ not only their shepherds, but also their flocks” (19).

Althusser’s term “expulsion” seems especially pertinent to the spatial metaphor of “the domestic interior” I have been considering here, yet the rhetorical effect of his phrase “not only their shepherds but also their flocks” represents a slightly different point of emphasis than the one I have assumed in my discussion thus far. By placing the noun “shepherds” as the object of the “not only” phrase, Althusser seems to be indicating that the *primary* arm of the dominant culture’s hegemony in the schools rests in the regulation of the *teacher*. While it is unclear whether this primacy is in terms of sequence or importance, in any case, regulation of the students becomes somehow secondary or subsequent. Thus, whereas I have been focusing on the degree to which Miss Dove effects homogeneity, Althusser and this “journey” scene both suggest that before she is able to exact conformity from others, she must first herself conform. In order for Miss Dove to effectively “shepherd” her “flock” of students into the domestic fold, she must

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<sup>15</sup> It is worth noting here that Miss Dove’s demands for propriety and conformity are feared as much as they are idealized throughout the novel. Her students often refer to her as “the *terrible* Miss Dove” and to her class as “an ordeal.” This element of fear in the students’ relationship with their teacher seems to offer a similar critique of Miss Dove’s pedagogy.

have first internalized a certain fear that to do otherwise would be to risk being “excluded” from the fold herself. Yet this journey scene raises the possibility that moving beyond the borders of the domestic fold can be much more rewarding than the ideology of the dominant culture would lead one to believe. In fact, as Miss Dove learns, such movement might even lead to “Life!” itself.

A novel so committed to evoking a nostalgia for small-town sameness and unity, however, could not long suffer this sort of narrative interruption, and indeed, the anesthesia soon wears off, and Miss Dove returns from her “journey.” As she awakens from the operation, the Miss Dove who had soared beyond the confines of her schoolteacher’s persona dissipates, and the keeper of orderly margins returns. As soon as she wakes up, “from outside, beyond glass, she heard the courthouse clock striking the half, and then the sweet, dissonant ringing of churchbells. It was Sunday” (215). It seems little coincidence that upon her return from her “travels,” the first things Miss Dove hears are the courthouse clock and the churchbells announcing morning services; both signal that she has returned to the “law and order” of the dominant culture’s political and religious structures, and therefore indicate that she has re-entered a realm of strict constancy and regularity. (We can recall, too, that early in the novel, the regularity of Miss Dove’s daily schedule is compared to the courthouse clock; that she immediately hears the clock upon waking leaves little doubt that she will soon return to her former orderly pattern of existence.) Yet it is worth noting that the ringing of the churchbells is “dissonant,” a possible indication that the Miss Dove who has “traveled” beyond the borders of the domestic interior may not find the confinement of its dominant culture as comforting as she once had. Indeed, she notes that “in an odd and bitter way she felt

disappointed . . . Why had she returned to this small, restricted, accustomed place? She had been free” (215-16).

This sense of disappointment at returning to the “restrictions” of the “small” world of the bounded domestic center is nevertheless fleeting, soon giving way to a sense of comfort and relief at returning “home.” Before returning from the dream state entirely, she momentarily recalls the final scene of her journey, when she had returned to the geography classroom: “For a scandalized instant, before she forgot it entirely and forever, she recalled the amorality she had been on the verge of uttering to those desk-jumping children in her dream” (216). The attitude expressed in this recollection reflects that Miss Dove has completed her passage back into the realm of the domestic, for the nonconformity she had been at the point of professing she now considers “amoral” (which, for Miss Dove, amounts to *immoral*), and she is “scandalized” by the thought that *she* might have been the one to profess it. Despite the freedom and vitality she had experienced in her “travels,” she is now convinced that there is only one place that she wants to be:

She knew, with a passion of yearning, exactly where she wished to go. Not to old Cathay. Not to London or Paris or to the anomalous country beyond the hills. She wanted to walk down Oakwood, across LaFayette, up Maple, over to Grant (nodding to William Holloway) and into the portals of Cedar Grove School. She wanted to go into the geography room. (216)

By highlighting Miss Dove’s earnest desire to return to a place of familiarity and order—however restrictive such order might be—the text’s conclusion successfully overrides the potential narrative disruption of the scene in the hospital.

Cementing the primary narrative arc is the final scene of the text, in which Miss Dove’s surgeon, a former pupil, greets the awakening Miss Dove with news that the

surgery was successful, and that her desires to return to teaching will soon be satisfied.

The final lines, perhaps the most schmaltzy of the entire novel, depict the surgeon acting out the prescribed daily routine for students as they enter Miss Dove's classroom:

He stood erect. He drew a curtain of gravity over his face, making it blank of everything except decorum and sober dedication. In the reserved, deferential, uninflected accents of Cedar Grove Elementary School, he spoke at last. "Good morning, Miss Dove," he said. (218)

In these lines, it seems, the reader is to hear both a collective sigh of relief and a communal cry of triumph issued from the citizens of Liberty Hill. From the parson and the cop—as well as the Brownies and the Cub Scouts—who show up at the hospital as potential blood donors, to the Rotarians who drink a toast to her recovery, the entire community can now rest at ease, knowing that the return of "normalcy," in the form of "gravity," "decorum," and "deference" to the dominant culture, is foretold in the surgeon's promise of Miss Dove's return to the classroom. Not only is normalcy and familiarity restored, however, the unity of the town itself is proven and validated, as well. The ending of the novel, insofar as it illustrates the way in which the entire town "comes together" in support of Miss Dove during her time of crisis, supports the notion that schoolteachers can and do create a like-mindedness among the individuals that comprise a community.

In this way, Patton's novel idealizes a national domesticity that is believed to be rooted in the common values of the American small town. The figure of the teacher, insofar as she is able to assure that those values will continue to be held in common, is thus portrayed as protector of national interests. Indeed, the book's dust jacket even asserts that Miss Dove is "an institution as solidly rooted in American life as the Bill of Rights." And the *Atlantic*'s review of the novel similarly draws Miss Dove as defender

of the domestic interior, in these terms: “Ms. Patton describes the teacher-town relationship which is so fundamental in our democracy. The author makes us see education for the dedicated task it is. She lets us touch the strands of loyalty and tradition which we have all felt and sometimes resisted” (Weeks 90). Of course, the questions that go unasked in this reviewer’s comments regard who constitutes this “we.” Unstated but assumed is *whose* tradition—loyalty to *whom* or *what*—is evoked through the novel, for as Biklen so astutely observes, “Patton’s novel rests on the construction of the European-American [and middle-class, I would add] experience as normative” (122).

Yet any doubt that other experiences even exist is obscured by the blissfulness of the homogeneity that is seen to be effected by the schoolteacher in this novel. Any questions about the boundaries between foreign and domestic spaces (e.g. whether they are fixed or mutable, comforting or confining) that might have been raised by portions of the novel’s subtext are quickly forgotten in the happy anticipation of Miss Dove’s triumphant return to the classroom. Thus, while the text may offer subtle resistance to the idea of the teacher as protector of a certain social homogenization within the domestic interior, the notion is left fundamentally unchallenged because Miss Dove finally emerges as the beloved hero, and Liberty Hill is left comfortably secure in the continuity she both represents and exacts. Like *The Blackboard Jungle*, then, *Good Morning, Miss Dove* effectively trumps any rumbling of discontent about the nature of “home” by reasserting conventional notions about domestic spaces— notions, both idealized and nostalgic, that attempt to convince the reader that for this schoolteacher, there is indeed “no place like home.”

## ***To Sir, With Love***

*“You should remember, Potter, that in a little while  
all of you may be expected to express  
these courtesies as part of your jobs;  
it would be helpful to you to become accustomed  
to giving and receiving them.”*

—From *To Sir, With Love*

Turning the discussion now to E. R. Braithwaite’s *To Sir, With Love*, set in London’s East End in the mid-1950’s, involves an obvious leap across political and geographical boundaries. Even though it is clearly marked as a distinctly British narrative, however, Braithwaite’s novel was enormously popular in the United States. Testament to the novel’s success was its subsequent 1967 film adaptation; ticket sales for the film reached \$7.2 million, leading it to become the eighth largest grossing movie of the year in the United States. Furthermore, the title song for the film, which was performed by the artist, Lulu, and shares its name with the novel, ranked number one on the American Billboard’s Top 100 Hits list for the year of 1967, surpassing such favorites as The Doors’ “Light My Fire,” Frankie Valli’s “Can’t Take My Eyes Off of You,” and Aretha Franklin’s “Respect.” Despite its obvious setting in a British context, then, this story and its characters clearly resonated with American audiences. Given the power of twentieth-century media to distribute narratives on such a large scale, and the power of Braithwaite’s narrative in particular to strike a chord within both the British and the American cultural imaginations, it seems plausible to conclude that there were teaching stories of this time that addressed and informed certain educational realities that reached across national borders.

Indeed, while the particulars of the cultural and educational climates in England and the United States were necessarily different at this time, it is nevertheless fair to say

that many of the same large-scale issues were being negotiated in both countries. Certainly, this question of defining the domestic interior, discussed above solely in terms of the United States, was also surfacing in a post-war England that was witnessing the slow erosion of centuries of empire-building. If, in an attempt to effect cultural and religious homogeneity among its citizens, the United States had added “under God” to the national allegiance its schoolchildren were asked to daily pledge, England had much earlier (1906) established an “Empire Day,” an annual celebration in the schools designed “to instil into the minds of children what are the privileges, the responsibilities and the duties of citizenship of the Empire” (Martin 84). As part of this celebration, students would be encouraged to “Think Imperially” “as they proudly contemplated red British areas on the world map . . . decorated themselves and their rooms in national colors, sang patriotic songs, produced tableaux, [and] paraded the Union Jack” (84). In England, then, as in the United States, the space of the classroom was a space where students were trained in the habits, values, and beliefs befitting a member of the dominant national culture.

Perhaps even more in England than in the U.S., however, the metaphor of the domestic interior had taken on very literal, spatial dimensions, as the country had acquired numerous “satellite” colonies around the globe—the “red British areas on the world map.” The existence of such “satellites” certainly problematized the project of defining the domestic interior, for they stood as representations of spaces that were part-of-home, but not-home. Indeed, the interior’s identity as colonial power was rooted in defining the satellites as “ours,” but its identity as culturally superior nation was simultaneously rooted in defining the satellites as “not-us.” The boundaries that surround

the interior, then, could be seen as being circumscribed by another set of concentric boundaries that surround “ours, but not-us.” Of course, the post-World War II era in which *To Sir, With Love* was written and published was beginning to see the rapid decline of England’s imperialist project; the Indian subcontinent had been partitioned in 1947, with Indian and Pakistan becoming independent of Great Britain, and the independence movements of many African colonies, as well as parts of the West Indies, would begin in the early 1960’s. Nevertheless, the problematic relations between the “interior” and its (former) colonies persisted, and the schoolroom continued to be an important space where such relations were negotiated.

Given this historical context, it is not surprising that Braithwaite’s teaching story draws upon the almost-mythic figure of the explorer, a narrative convention in which both Anglo and American ideology and cultural identity are deeply rooted. The text’s protagonist, best known in the novel as “Sir,” is a literary descendent of the prototypical brave frontiersman or sailor who sets out into uncharted territory to face and conquer the elements, the land, and the “primitive” natives. In stories that recount the experiences of such explorers, the narrative line most often falls into the pattern of the traditional quest myth, with the independent hero overcoming all odds finally to attain certain fixed ends. As Mary Louise Pratt notes in “Travel Narrative and Imperialist Vision,” “as a rule, in the classic quest the hero is simply recovering for the community a missing treasure that rightfully belongs to it but was lost” (201). This “missing treasure” often equates to the native subjects themselves, explorers being responsible both for the “recovery” of the “savage” minds and the restoration and acculturation of them to the civilization of the domestic interior’s capitalist, democratic society. Because, as was discussed above,



state-supported education had become one of the primary means of effecting such acculturation, many narratives of teaching utilize this pattern, as well. As the front cover of the 1971 Pyramid edition of *To Sir, With Love* asserts, Braithwaite's tale is "the inspiring story of a band of schoolroom *savages* and the teacher who *tamed* them" (my emphasis). If the very title of *The Blackboard Jungle* suggests that the classroom is a dark, dense, unknown territory, *To Sir, With Love*, too, dramatizes the distance that teachers must traverse in order to reach their student populations.

Thus, I argue that much like Miss Dove, Sir serves both to reinforce conventional conceptions of the domestic space of the dominant national culture, and to shepherd his students into the fold of the domestic interior by demanding their alignment to the values and beliefs of that dominant culture. I also argue that aspects of the subtext of Braithwaite's novel, like both *The Blackboard Jungle* and *Good Morning, Miss Dove*, offer some resistance to traditional notions of "the domestic" and to the teacher's role in preserving and protecting it. Yet, also like the two novels discussed above, *To Sir, With Love* does not ultimately sustain that resistance, and instead, in the text's primary arc, relies on and reinscribes comfortable demarcations between "home" and "not-home." Unlike Miss Dove, however, who effects domestic homogeneity by remaining within the "interior" and renouncing her dreams of travel, Sir achieves the same effect precisely because he *does* travel—from the outside *to* the interior. In fact, it is his somewhat precarious position within the domestic interior that highlights the difficulties and dilemmas of his project of protecting it via his teaching.

As a way of prefacing this analysis of the novel, I would like to call attention to the comments of a reader who posted a review of *To Sir, With Love* on a website

sponsored by Amazon.com. Admittedly, Amazon is not the most objective, scholarly source for literary research, yet because I work on texts that are not frequently studied in the academy, and because I am particularly interested in how these texts are popularly received, I often visit the Amazon site to read on-line reviews of these texts, reviews written by readers who are not professors, graduate students, or professional critics. The first on-line review of *To Sir, With Love* is written by Greg Gatto, who offers a basic plot summary of Braithwaite's novel. Gatto tells how Sir had faced countless instances of racial discrimination in his initial job search in London (Sir is black, and originally hails from British Guyana). Gatto goes on to detail how Sir finally secures a teaching post at an East End high school, "eventually find[ing] a job as a teacher of a tough group of lower class youngsters who have made many a teacher turn tale and run."

I suggest that Gatto's accidental use of the word "tale" for its homophone "tail" is remarkably fitting here, for it accurately describes the relation between this novel and the conventional explorer story of which it is a derivative. On the one hand, the novel does seem to "turn" the imperialist "tale," for Braithwaite's explorer appears to challenge the traditional formulation of quest myth. Not only is Sir not a member of the dominant white culture of London, his original home is one of those "red British areas on the world map," which would not gain independence until 1966. Representative of one of those spaces that the dominant national culture would view as "ours, but not us," then, in many ways Sir is aligned with a group that was itself envisioned as a barbarous, "other" community. Furthermore, some critics have argued that Sir embodies a liberal or progressive pedagogical style, thoroughly student-centered and sensitive to students' cultural backgrounds. Typical of this beloved esteem in which he is held is a second on-

line review of *To Sir, With Love*, which offers these comments: “Simply wonderful is all I can say. This is how a teacher should take care of students.”

Yet this very notion of “taking care” of students only slightly differs from the explorer’s objective of recovering and restoring the natives, for both ideas imply that student or native populations are inherently deficient—intellectually, culturally, or otherwise. Indeed, this is where Braithwaite’s novel seems to “run”: having “turned tale,” or having superficially modified certain narrative conventions, it seems to “run” from issuing a more substantial, fundamental challenge to this trope, as well as from engaging the knotty ethical dilemmas embedded in the act of defining and preserving national homogeneity through the schools. Indicative of this tension between Braithwaite’s novel and the quest narrative whose conventions it draws from is Sir’s name itself. Ostensibly, this title attributes to the teacher a measure of respect as an individual, suggesting that a racial or political “other” *can* assume the same measure of personal authority conventionally reserved for the white hero. Yet in the non-specific designation of “Sir,” Braithwaite’s personal name becomes lost, obscuring this individual’s singularity under the cover of the generic. In this same way, I suggest, potential challenges to the imperialist narrative are ultimately overshadowed by the text’s more significant and more pervasive adherence to generic conventions.

That the protagonist of this novel is not a thoroughly conventional adventure story hero is a point hardly worth belaboring. In traditional formulations of explorer narratives, following as they do the pattern of the quest myth, the heroes are almost always white males, and they are almost always members of the dominant national culture, which in this case would be England itself. Interestingly, however, when Sir

recalls his childhood in British Guyana, he remembers not differentiating himself from, but identifying with the heroes of British adventure stories:

As a boy I was taught to appreciate English literature, poetry and prose, classical and contemporary, and it was absolutely natural for me to identify myself with the British heroes of the adventure stories against the villains of the piece who were invariably non-British and so, to my boyish mind, more easily capable of villainous conduct. (40)

Undoubtedly, his own schooling as a child, controlled as it likely was by British administration, had obscured for Sir the problematic relationship between the British imperial power and its colonies; he even explains, “I had grown up British in every way. Myself, my parents and my parents’ parents, none of us knew or could know any other way of living, of thinking, of being; we knew no other cultural pattern” (40). Given this boyhood understanding of colonial relations, then, Sir had no reason to differentiate himself from other members of the domestic interior.

His experiences as an adult, however, unveil those colonial tensions that had been obscured through much of his childhood. He completes a tenure with the Royal Air Force, and then decides to move to London to seek civilian employment. Almost instantly, he finds himself to be a racial and political outsider, day-to-day discrimination forcing him to recognize that colonial subjects were not, in fact, members of the political, national interior. Most pointedly, he finds himself unable to secure employment. Though he had received invaluable training and experience as an engineer in the R. A. F., he was forced to resort to teaching when no London engineering firm would hire him. Marginalized to the fringes of the domestic culture with which he had previously viewed himself as aligned, he describes his “depths of disillusionment” as immeasurable (40).

Thus, while Sir does characterize his first teaching experience as an exploration into the deep unknown of the foreign classroom, he is also acutely aware that his assumption of the role of explorer—and particularly all of the power and authority this position entails—is rather non-traditional. For instance, the novel opens by recounting the morning on which Sir first arrives at the secondary school where he has applied for a teaching position. Interestingly, this scene begins not at the school doors or in the headmaster's office, but in the double-decker bus that carries Sir to the interview. This short description of his travel to the school is significant, for it provides the reader with a view of Sir in the larger cultural context of mid-century, post-war London, and it establishes the sort of Du Boisean “double consciousness” that this teacher/explorer will represent. Sir is very conscious of the fact that he represents a racial minority; he remarks that his fellow passengers on the bus, all women, “joshed and chivvied each other and the conductor in an endless stream of lewdly suggestive remarks and retorts, quite careless of being overheard by me—a Negro, and the only other male on the bus” (5-6). The fact that he immediately, within the first page of the novel, draws attention to his blackness, even while the women's comments are not racially driven, indicates that Sir is keenly aware of his position outside the dominant white culture. This awareness is reinforced moments later when another white woman boards the bus and refuses to take the seat next to Sir, the only empty seat on the bus. In this way, Braithwaite quickly establishes the idea that the hero who will enter *this* blackboard jungle is one who will challenge the conventions of the explorer trope.

Sir carries this double consciousness, as well as this sense of himself as a somewhat unconventional “explorer,” into his experience of teaching. After he has

accepted the position at Greenslade Secondary School, he listens as the headmaster begins to advise him of the students' demographics, primarily summarizing their family backgrounds and socioeconomic situations. Upon receiving this information, Sir remarks,

I found I was becoming increasingly irritated by his recital of the children's difficulties. My own experiences during the past two years invaded my thoughts, reminding me that these children were white; hungry or filled, naked or clothed, they were white, and as far as I was concerned, that fact alone made the only difference between the haves and the have-nots. (29)

It is clear, then, that Sir is very mindful of the racial composition of England's dominant culture. Furthermore, he understands all of the privileges that are allotted to that culture, privileges that are often withheld from minority cultures; he himself had experienced such withholding of privileges as he had been denied job after job due to racial discrimination. He understands, in other words, that he does not have access to all of the traditional forms of authority assumed by conventional explorers. To borrow again from Jo Keroes' *Tales out of School, To Sir with Love* "quite literally revers[es] the power relation, the black man assuming both adult and masculine authority over a largely white group of children, an inversion of the usual relationship between blacks and whites" (79-80). Thus, as he makes his first foray into the unknown territory of teaching, Sir recognizes the way in which his acceptance of this position challenges the conventional racial power structure.

Despite such turnings of the tale, such initial challenges to the trope of the imperialist explorer, however, this text ultimately does "run" back towards the very conventional narrative formulation of cultural conquest. Indeed, if we return to the opening scene of *To Sir, With Love*, we see how it depicts Sir's position within the

*dominant* cultures of gender and class, as well as the marginalized culture of racial and national “other.” In fact, the terms that he uses to survey his fellow passengers on the bus are nothing if not squarely within the conventional, imperialist rhetorical mode. For instance, he describes the jovial charwomen from above as

thick-armed, bovine women, huge-breasted, with heavy bodies irrevocably distorted by frequent childbearing. [. . .] There was a look of indestructibility about them, from the tip of each tinted head in its gaudy headscarf . . . to the solid legs and large feet which seemed rooted in the earth. [. . .] In spite of the hairgrips and headscarves, they had their own kind of dignity. (5)

Recognizable in this description are many of the stereotypes typically invoked in Western explorers’ observations of indigenous peoples, specifically women: the comparison to animals, the fascination with the largeness of breasts, the assumption of fecundity, a perceived connection to “the earth” or the natural world, and the “appreciation” of a crude dignity or “noble savageness.” Any question of Sir’s sense of superiority over the lower-class women is erased in his final estimation of them: “Unable to resist the amusement I felt, I smiled inwardly at the naturalness of these folks who were an integral part of one of the world’s greatest cities and at the same time as common as hayseeds. There they sat, large and vigorous, the bulwark of the adventurous” (7). Of course, only from a position of gender and class superiority can one be “amused” at the “naturalness” and “commonness” of the women “folk.”

Once at the school, Sir finds a physical construction of space that reinforces this sense of himself as culturally superior explorer. Crucial to understanding the explorer figure is understanding his pattern of movement, which most frequently involves a cycle of beginning in the national “center,” venturing out to colonial territories, returning to the center to gather supplies and strength, venturing back out again to further disseminate the

center's culture, and so forth. I would suggest that the physical layout of the school's floor plan invites the teacher to follow a similar pattern of movement, in that central to the school's physical space is the inner sanctum of the teachers' staffroom, and surrounding it are domestic "outposts" where the decrees prescribed in the inner sanctum are subsequently disseminated and enacted among the students, or the captive subjects. As noted in the discussion of *The Blackboard Jungle*, created in the space of the teachers' staffroom is an intimate, familial environment in which the faculty can gather during non-teaching times. This environment seems to parallel the national center from which the explorer originates and to which he periodically returns. Unlike the teachers' room of Hunter's novel, however, this space in *To Sir, With Love* is not exclusively masculine; in this sense, it is also akin to another inner domestic space: the parents' bedroom—an intensely private space where the grown-ups go to, among other things, discuss the children's behavior and devise strategies for managing that behavior.<sup>16</sup> In fact, this discussion of the school's physical space weds both notions of the domestic, familial and national, addressed in Section I thus far. The centrality and insularity of the teachers' staffroom symbolizes both the national "home-base" of the explorer and the personal "home-base" of the parent. In both senses, however, this space serves as a domestic center in which persons in positions of power gather to formulate strategies for exercising that power once they leave the center.

Outlying from the staffroom, then, are the domestic territories, including, for instance, the school cafeteria. Interestingly, the cafeteria is arranged so that students sit eight to a table, dining "family style":

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<sup>16</sup> Little coincidence, then, that the romance that eventually blossoms between Sir and Gillian Blanchard, another teacher at Greenslade, begins in the staffroom over an intimate cup of tea.



The children were seated in groups of eight, two of them in turn being responsible for collecting and distributing the food for their particular group. Both boys and girls took turns at this and showed remarkable skill in portioning each course evenly and quickly. At the end of each course the day's two servers stacked the dishes, collected the cutlery and rushed them away to the kitchen staff. At the end of the meal the tablecloths were shaken and folded, and each group sat quietly awaiting the signal of dismissal. (25)

The teachers sit at a table "slightly apart from the rows of folding tables occupied by the children" in order to watch over the "children's" behavior during lunchtime, parenting over them as they take turns, two-by-two, practicing to become parents themselves. (For me, the very distance between the teachers' and students' tables evokes images of family gatherings, with the adults circled around the primary, formal dining table, and the children relegated to a make-shift "kids' table" in a secondary space such as the kitchen or hallway.) In this way, the teachers' primary responsibility, in addition to taking turns offering thanks for the meal, is to assure that the students enact their domestic roles correctly.

Similarly, there is a large space reserved for the Domestic Science Department, a space on which Sir looks with great approval during his initial tour of the school. He admires "the gleaming gas cookers, pots and pans, the rows of well-scrubbed heavy deal tables, the pedal sewing machines and the washing machines all spick and span in their places (23-24). He is likewise impressed with Mrs. Dale-Evans, the Domestic Science teacher who maintains the order and cleanliness of this space and the students within it with all the grace and ease of the fabled "happy housewife." He observes that "this woman with her ready, listening ear and proven, sound advice, was both teacher and mother to these girls," and he concludes that "if she could accomplish such near perfection . . . then I would most certainly have a shot at it" (24). As he regularly confers

with Dale-Evans in the staffroom and picks up tips for achieving such “perfection,” Sir finds one of his primary models for successful teaching in the mother figure who protects and maintains her “home” room, the most obviously “domestic” space of the school.

All of these spatial signifiers combine to create a syntax of domesticity that is easily read by students and faculty alike. The high esteem in which Sir holds the department of Domestic Science indicates his reverence for the habits and values of the domestic center, and the physical layout of the school only underscores the idea that the teachers are responsible for carrying those habits and values from the center into the outlying student populations. While the floor plan of the school certainly does not *cause* Sir to assume such a view, it does anticipate and prefigure the paternalistic way in which he will lord over the space of his classroom. It is worth noting that this hierarchy of the domestic is not lost on the students; they call their principal “the Old Man,” as a rebellious teenager might flippantly refer to an annoyingly watchful father. Conversely, Sir, in the final two words of the novel, names his students “my children” (189).

Thus, when he begins teaching the predominantly white, but working-class East End students, Sir embodies many of the paternalistic tendencies of the conventional explorer, including viewing the “natives” as simple-minded children who beg for guidance and discipline. Although Penny Smith, in her essay on *Lean on Me*, suggests that *To Sir With Love* “challenge[s] the prevailing ideas about what’s worth knowing and seek[s] answers from the students themselves” (17), I would suggest that his sense of cultural superiority leads Sir not to challenge but to reinforce prevailing ideas about what and whose knowledge is valuable. He takes his class to the Victoria and Albert Museum

to see a special clothing exhibit<sup>17</sup> and to the Old Vic to see Laurence Olivier in *Hamlet*. He plays classical music to them at assembly, although he still “allows” them to listen to some “jive,” as well. In so doing, he legitimates certain spaces as “proper” venues for learning, and validates the distinction between true art and mere entertainment.

Even more problematic is the paternalistic way in which Sir manipulates and regulates his students’ very persons: their modes of speech, dress, and behavior. In so doing, he affirms very restrictive gender and class norms, to the point that *To Sir With Love*, as Keroes observes, “comes close to reinscribing colonialist impulses at the same time it comments upon them” (80). For instance, in one of the most memorable scenes of the book, Sir enters the classroom to find that someone has deposited a used sanitary napkin in the grate of the small fireplace that heats the room. Overcome with anger, he sends the boys from the room, and “then turned the full lash of my angry tongue on those girls. I told them how sickened I was by their general conduct, crude language, sluttish behavior, and of their free and easy familiarity with the boys” (70). Here, it is clear that he is not “seeking answers from students themselves” but schooling his female subjects—who seem to be, in fact, objects, as the phrase “those girls” would suggest—in what he deems to be proper sexual conduct and deportment for women. Similarly, he notices with disapproval a student “with a pair of heavy breasts which swung loosely under a thin jumper, evidently innocent of any support. I wondered at the kind of parent who would allow a girl to go out so sloppily attired” (53). Thus, he takes it upon himself to educate the female students on the need to wear bras and the inappropriateness of too-tight

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<sup>17</sup> See John Willinsky’s *Learning to Divide the World: Education at Empire’s End* for an insightful analysis of the link between “the museum [and] the unfettered spectacle of empire” (65). He persuasively argues that “although the museum preserves, honors, and informs . . . we need to be able to imagine what the museum presumes, how that presumption informs our education, and how that presumption has been

sweaters and skirts, just as he “teaches” them to wear heels and make-up, as is befitting for young ladies.

The students’ acculturation to the dominant standards of the patriarchal middle-class involves Sir’s regulation of their speech, as well. He insists that he be referred to as “Sir” or Mr. Braithwaite, that the men in the class be called by their last names, and that the women in the class be called “Miss.” When one of the students protests, Sir replies, “You should remember, Potter, that in a little while all of you may be expected to express these courtesies as part of your job” (74). Implicit in his persistent emphasis on politeness is the suggestion that Sir assumes these students will remain in positions of class subservience, so Sir’s suggestion here that Potter will in due course wind up in a low-level position where it is only right to revere one’s superiors naturalizes the very system of oppression that he himself has suffered under. Indeed, this scene recalls another of Althusser’s observations in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”:

[C]hildren at school also learn the ‘rules’ of good behavior, i.e. the attitude that should be observed by every agent in the division of labour, according to the job he is ‘destined’ for: rules of morality, civic and professional conscience, which actually means rules of respect for the socio-technical division of labour and ultimately the rules of the order established by class domination. (6)

Again to quote Keroes, “Though he wants to help them, [Sir] resorts to a pedagogy of etiquette rather than of ethical engagement, one that ensures that they will (politely) remain in their place” (88). Because the narrative is related through Sir’s “culturally superior” perspective, however, it legitimizes Sir’s pedagogy; the text presents this school and these students as dirty, ignorant, and sometimes even vile—savage minds and bodies that almost beg to be civilized by such a “pedagogy of etiquette.”

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fed by the very specific material and historical relations that fall under the name ‘imperialism’” (69).

Thus, I argue that despite apparent oppositions to the traditional trope, the representations of educational success in this novel still present a thoroughly conventional view of the teacher as one whose success rests in students' acculturation to the value and power structures of the dominant culture. Specifically, in *To Sir, With Love*, student success consists of becoming an adept performer, able to re-articulate certain pieces of information or to mimic linguistic practices witnessed in the teacher throughout the course of the narrative. And for the teacher, success is equated with the loving devotion of the class, measured by the hugs, smiles, and graduation-dance serenades that are eventually given by the students at the conclusion of the story—a sign both that the teacher has “recovered” the natives and that the “natives” have been acculturated to the family of the dominant culture. In other words, Sir is depicted as successful only as he acts as benevolent bearer of culture to an impoverished student population. Thus, certain challenges to the conventional trope notwithstanding, this narrative continues to posit rather imperialistic objects of attainment as the *telos* of the story's action, thereby reinforcing cultural and narratological norms and leaving the traditional myth of the heroic explorer essentially uncontested; it has “turned tale and run.”

In sum, *To Sir, With Love* charges the teacher in the state-supported school with many of the same responsibilities of protecting the interests of the domestic interior outlined in the two novels discussed above. Like Rick Dadier, Sir is expected to be the paternalistic papa, establishing order within his family of unruly children. And like Miss Dove, Sir is responsible for shepherding his wayward flock of students, unschooled in the habits and values of the dominant culture, into the fold of the national domestic. It is true

that elements of all three of these novels do challenge notions of the domestic embedded in these responsibilities. *The Blackboard Jungle* challenges the differentiation of gender roles that often accompanies conventional divisions between public and private spaces; *Good Morning, Miss Dove* and *To Sir, With Love* suggest that divisions between foreign and domestic spaces may be both arbitrary and permeable, challenging the conventional view that such divisions are “natural,” and therefore essential to preserving national identity. Nevertheless, all three of these teaching narratives, British and American alike, ultimately override these potential challenges by resorting to traditional notions of what “home” spaces are and should be. The resulting texts are ones that continue to portray the familial domestic as a safely insular, feminine space, and the national domestic as a safely insular, homogeneous space. These three teachers, then, are left with the difficult task of fostering and perpetuating in the space of the classroom these problematic (not to mention unrealistic) domestic ideals.

By way of contrast, the tensions between domestic ideals and domestic realities are much less easily dismissed in other novels of teaching published around this time. Two novels in particular depict protagonists who, though effective in their own peculiar ways, do not assume the same heroic status attributed to the teachers of the novels discussed in this section. I contend that in *Spinster* and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, “home” is contested to a much greater degree, seen alternately as confining, stifling, threatening, and silencing. As the teachers in these novels work to reconcile the demand to protect “home” with the recognition that “home” might not be *worth* protecting, they both fail to qualify as unquestionable heroes. As a result, issues of the domestic interior are more openly questioned and negotiated in these novels. In fact, the extent to which

their protagonists struggle to maintain “domestic interests” via their teaching ultimately threatens the very idea of domestic tranquility—what it is and how it should be protected. These concerns are the focus of Section II, “Confronting Domestic Violence.”

## SECTION II

### CONFRONTING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (OR, WHERE'S THE "ROOM" IN "HOMEROOM"?)

If undercurrents of repression and domination ran beneath the surface of the primary narrative lines of the three novels of Section I, they in fact rise to prominence in the novels examined here. The protagonists of Sylvia Ashton-Warner's *Spinster* (1959) and Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961), in drastically different fashions, struggle against their realization of the costs of casting the school as a conventional home-like space. These teachers recognize explicitly what those of Section I do not: the precarious, if not altogether fictional, nature of the coherence and unity upon which the security of home is dependent.

Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty have suggested in "Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to Do with It?" that there is a "tension between desire for home, for synchrony, for sameness, and the realization of the repressions and violence that make home, harmony, sameness imaginable, and that enforce it" (208). Similarly, they continue, "there is an irreconcilable tension between the search for a secure place from which to speak, within which to act, and the awareness of the price at which secure places are bought, the awareness of the exclusions, the denials, the blindnesses on which they are predicated" (206). In large part, the novels of Section II work to unearth these tensions, tensions that had become embedded (and to some degree obscured) in the rhetorical association of schools with homes, of classrooms with safe, stable places. Whereas the protagonists of Section I seem able to overlook or ignore such tensions, the protagonists of these novels virtually collapse under the weight of them. In fact, their



awareness of the “exclusions, the denials, [and] the blindnesses” endured by both themselves and their students in the name of maintaining domestic tranquility ultimately causes these teachers to be displaced, either voluntarily or involuntarily, to a space outside of the school. The pain and disappointment that are the result of this displacement serve to further highlight the dramatic costs of “enforcing” “home, harmony, [and] sameness” via the schools, rendering oxymoronic the very notion of “domestic tranquility” so resolutely defended in Section I.

### *Spinster*

*I suppose I had better go home now; if you can call it home.  
Have I a home? The most important thing in life,  
one of them, so Eugene said, was a home and background.  
Where is my home and background?  
—From Spinster*

Published in 1959, Sylvia Ashton-Warner’s first novel, *Spinster*, met with much the same international acclaim and popularity as *To Sir, With Love*. When the novel was released in the United States, *Time Magazine* listed it among its top ten books of the year, and in 1961 MGM adapted the novel to screen in its film *Two Loves*, starring Shirley MacLain, Laurence Harvey, and Jack Hawkins.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, *Spinster*, printed roughly one year before *To Sir, With Love*, addresses many of the same teaching issues as Braithwaite’s text, but Ashton-Warner plays these issues out to a vastly different, and finally bleaker, end. *Spinster*’s protagonist is white Anna Vorontosov, middle-aged and unmarried, who teaches the youngest class of a New Zealand elementary school attended primarily by students from the country’s indigenous Māori population. Like Sir, then, Anna must negotiate certain pressures that arise from teaching within an educational

system shaped extensively by British colonialism, specifically those pressures that demand the teacher's protection of national domestic interests. Yet Anna's location in a former imperial colony, rather than the British domestic center itself, seems to magnify the costs at which such protection is bought—costs that might be overlooked by a Braithwaite who teaches in London, the very heart of the British domestic interior. Anna's awareness of these costs causes her to question and ultimately abandon an educational system willing, in the pursuance of ethically questionable national interests, to exact such a harsh toll from its teachers and students.

I am again prompted to draw a parallel between fiction and biography here, a move that is not entirely unwarranted, since Ashton-Warner's 1963 text, *Teacher*, is an autobiographical account of the development of her pedagogy while teaching in a New Zealand school of Maori students. In fact, much of *Teacher* is a direct echo of *Spinster*, with Ashton-Warner duplicating entire passages of the earlier text with little to no modification of the prose. Like Anna, Ashton-Warner encountered great difficulty in selling her teaching theories to a New Zealand audience, even though the ideas she sets forth in *Teacher* won great approval in circles of English and North American educators. Critic Suzanne Edgar has even characterized "conservative" New Zealand's response to Ashton-Warner's work as "unimpressed and indifferent," and further noted that "the High Commission in Canberra holds just one copy of one of her nine books in its library" (60). Ashton-Warner would thus have access to a good deal of first-hand experience as she rendered this teacher who fails to gain an institutional foothold in her native country's educational system.

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<sup>1</sup> In 1986, MGM also released *Sylvia*, a film based on Ashton-Warner's life and teaching as they are recounted in her later, nonfiction texts, *Teacher* and *I Passed This Way*.

This process of a teacher's becoming disillusioned with state-supported education in (former) imperial colonies has been described by John Willensky in

*Learning to Divide the World: Education at Empire's End*. He writes,

These colonial forms of schooling offered women the chance to intervene with some compassion on behalf of the young in the otherwise manly business of bringing the colonies into line. Although teaching brought home the claim of the empire on these children's land and minds, it also left the teachers the wiser for the schooling they came to India to provide. After teaching for only a short period, they were in a far better position to understand the vile prejudices that infused the governing of the colonies, prejudices that remained largely invisible in Great Britain. (105)

Of course Willensky here discusses colonial schooling in India, and he addresses not those teachers originally born within the borders of the colony, but British citizens who traveled to teach in imperial colonies. (The situation we find in *Anna and the King of Siam*, for example.) Yet the dynamic to which he alludes accurately describes the slow and painful awakening that Anna experiences as she, a white descendent of European settlers, sees exposed the "vile prejudices" of New Zealand's state education system, a system bearing significant vestiges of colonial schooling. Indeed the novel details her recognition and fight against at least two specific manifestations of the British educational system's "vile prejudices" against the native Māori.

First and foremost, she witnesses the tyranny of the school's imposition of the English language. Colonialist efforts to "civilize" newly acquired territories often involves the banning of indigenous languages, and indeed, in his essay on "The History and Development of the Māori Language," Richard Benton notes that "once British settlement of New Zealand meant the Māori had been replaced as the majority population, a vigorous attempt was made to supplant the Māori language with English, even for the Māori community. The spearhead of this was the education system" (13).

Thus, like so many other European colonies, New Zealand witnessed the slow erosion of its indigenous languages, an erosion largely effected through the institution of the school. Allan Bell, in “The Politics of English in New Zealand,” documents that English was first introduced as a medium of instruction in the schools in 1867. By the 1890s, compulsory schooling had been extended to Māori children, yet in the following decades, school administrators had also effected a “deliberate provision of teachers who could speak only English,” ensuring the “long-term effectiveness” of efforts to make English the predominant language of New Zealand (Benton 13). Accompanying these state-sponsored attempts to eliminate the possibility of *instruction* in Māori were similar efforts to eliminate the speaking of Māori in the schools altogether, by teachers and students alike. As early as 1876, a petition had been issued to amend the Native Schools Act so that ““there should not be a word of Māori allowed to be spoken in the school”” (Bell 67). In some schools, then, canings and other forms of corporal punishment began to be delivered for each utterance of a Māori word or phrase that a student might happen to let slip. The result of all such efforts was a thorough debasement of the Māori language, in the eyes of white settlers and their descendents to be sure, and sometimes even in the eyes of the Māori themselves, as they were regularly taught to believe that theirs was not the language of economic or cultural progress.<sup>2</sup>

Consequently, some fifty years later, after Commonwealth autonomy had been achieved, and even after some concern was being raised over the preservation of the Māori language and culture, the remnants of years of systematic eradication of Māori

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<sup>2</sup> The aforementioned petition, for example, was issued by a group of Māori leaders. Bell notes that “such a move marks the saddest phase of language loss in a colonial situation—when the colonized people co-operates in, or even seems to lead, the drive towards the loss of its own language. It arises from the

within the schools would be difficult to overcome. Anna herself, for example, though she teaches in a school where Māori students vastly outnumber white students (and though she is sympathetic to the Māoris' unique language needs), seems to lack any significant degree of fluency in Māori. She certainly understands a number of words and phrases, but it is never indicated that she would be competent to provide instruction in Māori. What is perhaps exceptional about Anna, however, is that she *recognizes* the discrimination inherent in this kind of instructional setting, and she actively fights, in ways that I will soon discuss, to diminish the imposition of English on her Māori students.

The second “vile prejudice” Anna witnesses in the school administration is an effort, on a more general level, to manage the behavior and values of the Māori students. Much like the efforts we saw put forth by both Sir and Miss Dove to keep their students “in line” with the dominant culture of the “domestic interior,” Anna feels an acute pressure to “teach” her Māori students out of many of their habits and beliefs that are inconsistent with those of the white, European-descended population. When she is visited by state School Inspectors, for example, she feels she must reign in the songs and energy of her students’ *poi*, or Māori dance, in order to present the quiet, orderly learning environment she knows the administration favors. Similarly, she senses that she is to regulate the Māoris’ modes of dress, their means of conflict resolution, and their fear of a ghost that haunts their community. Such attempts to shape and re-shape the society of the indigenous people through the schooling of their children were every bit as damaging to the Māori culture and psyche as the administration’s imposition of English; again to

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overwhelming pressure of the imperial language as the language of advancement or even survival in the new colonial society” (67).

quote Willensky: “The challenge [for the colonial school] was to instill in the native the very character ‘insensibly’ acquired by civilized peoples at home and on the playground. The problem was to teach one group what others hadn’t needed to be formally taught. This was intended, at best, to raise up a people in a studied, and thereby inadequate, approximation of their betters” (Willinsky 91).

Thus, we see in this educational context the very dynamic examined at the beginning of the discussion of *Good Morning, Miss Dove*. If American public schools were to acculturate, but not assimilate, early urban immigrants to the culture of the white, rural middle class, New Zealand colonial schools were to acculturate, but not assimilate, native Māori populations to the culture of the white European settlers.<sup>3</sup> Miss Dove and Sir, we saw, both acted as instruments of such acculturation, securing their own place (even if precarious) within the dominant domestic culture by schooling their students on their “proper,” often subordinate, relationship to that culture. Anna, on the other hand, resists subordinating either herself or her students to a domestic culture that is willing to enact such cultural violence on the citizens who live in its metaphorical margins.

In this resistance, however, she finds herself quite alone; her contact with other teachers sympathetic to her efforts is minimal, and while some school administrators finally agree to entertain some of her pedagogical ideas, she nevertheless finds institutional support of her teaching to be severely lacking. As a result, she loses

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<sup>3</sup> This dynamic between European- and Maori-descended citizens persists well into the 1970s and 80s, as is indicated in late-century discussions of New Zealand educational reform. Michael Hollings, for example, in his 1990 essay on “The Politics of Education in Māori,” writes:

The catch phrase [in educational reform] has become ‘focus on learner needs, not ethnicity or socio-economic status.’ The problem with this approach is that the definers of learners’ needs and the designers of remedies are frequently middle-class Pākehā [white people]. Not surprisingly, the consequences of these policies have reflected the assimilatory bias of their framers. The initiatives of Pākehā in respect of Māori education, by failing to address the fundamental problem of the

confidence in her self and her professional convictions, to the point that she no longer feels qualified to teach. The final pages of the novel depict her departure not only from the school, but from the country, as well. In leaving her post at the school, however, she abandons both her literal and symbolic “place” in the community. Thus, believing the foundation of her country’s educational practice to be ethically unsound, but nevertheless anxious in her departure from that practice, Anna fails to find a true “home” in this teaching community, but also fails to define a satisfactory “home” outside of it. In this way, the narrative turn that concludes the novel serves to challenge—and almost undermine—the very notions of “country,” “place,” and “home,” especially as they are furthered through the medium of the public schoolteacher.

A word regarding my focus with this novel: in spite of my assertions regarding the importance of examining these texts’ presentation of “home” in a personal or familial sense, I have obviously chosen to foreground here issues of a national or cultural “domestic.” The truth is that there is much to be said about both in this novel, and I regret my inability to examine those concerns more fully here. Suffice it to say that the novel challenges the notion of “home” in terms of the “personal” domestic in much the same way that it challenges the notion of nationhood in terms of a larger “cultural” domestic. On the one hand, the title itself alludes to a non-conventional configuration of a personal home, and indeed, the text, in its presentation of this passionate, creative, and intelligent teacher, seems to challenge the negative stereotypes of “spinsterhood” and posit this “alternative” form of “home” as one that is as fulfilling as conventional

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historical disempowerment of the Māori through colonization, have exacerbated the sense of grievance they seek to overcome. (55)

marriage and family.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, however, Anna is also instilled with many of those negative “spinster” characteristics, especially profound loneliness, that she denies experiencing in other portions of the story. The ending of the book, too, in its suggestion that Anna leaves teaching in New Zealand to “settle down” with a former lover, supports the idea that a complete abandonment of “home”—in *all* of its traditional configurations—can’t be sustained indefinitely. Once again, then, we would find Anna rather “homeless,” the resolution of her “personal” domestic dilemma as ambiguous and problematic as that of the “public” domestic.

Nevertheless, the setting of the narrative in a racially and culturally divided New Zealand compels me to accent questions of nation and empire, for the novel offers a rich and powerful critique of the notion of the schoolteacher as protector and guarantor of the national “domestic interior.” Indeed, the narrative yields countless examples of the ways in which Anna is a departure from those “ideal” and idealized teachers, such as Sir and Miss Dove, who work to maintain the boundaries between who’s in and who’s out of the interior’s elite. As mentioned above, for instance, she resists regulating her students’ movement within the space of the classroom, challenging the demand for the restrained, orderly behavior deemed “proper” by the European-dominated school board. The reader can sense this resistance even in the very first pages of the novel; in one of the first scenes in the classroom, children crowd Anna with questions, asking permission to go

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<sup>4</sup> For example, Vorontosov says of a male colleague:

If only he could learn that, for me anyway, there can be interests other than men; that there can be romance outside desire; that with me, in spite of the reputations of the unmarried, relations with the male come second to my relations with my work; that the need for the physical engagement . . . can at my age, in some women and to a workable extent anyway, lift to the realm of the mind to be partially consummated there; if only . . . he would get it out of his head . . . that I am, in that stock phrase ‘starved, hungry and bitter’; that my mind . . . is able to conceive and bear fruit as cheerfully as any body of a smug married woman and that my heart, in spite of the insubordinate responses of my person, can be ineffably gayer. (49)



outside, to begin artwork, to sit next to a friend, and she thinks to herself, “So much asking! Who am I, the law or God?” (7). Here, the teacher is not rhetorically associated with the law and order of the courthouse clock or the religious commanding of the church bells, as we saw with Miss Dove. Instead, she deliberately *dissociates* herself from that type of authority, questioning her right to mandate each and every aspect of a student’s movement or behavior within in the space of the school.

Not only does Anna question her right to issue such mandates, however, she also questions the pedagogical value of doing so. For instance, she catches herself telling a student to tuck his shirt in, and she actually *chastises* herself for the reprimand: “Here I am on the old worn track of telling a child how to do a thing instead of leaving it to his own effort and his own way. I’m tasting things for him first, just like his mother”<sup>5</sup> (36). If Sir busies himself with schooling his students on what sorts of skirts and sweaters are “appropriate” for young women to wear, Anna sees greater value in a student’s developing a sense of self-determination than in his/her forced adherence to social conventions of dress. She has similar ideas in regards to behavior management, or the prescription of social order. For instance, she has one Māori student who is especially violent, a behavior, most teachers would agree, that calls for teacher intervention and modification. Yet rather than punish or discipline him into submission to rules she has prescribed, she concludes: “There’s only one thing to be done about Seven at this malleable age and I do it. [. . .] In the world behind my eyes I see a hazy picture of a volcano with two vents: one is creativeness and one is destructiveness. I sit the little chap gently down in his small desk with Tame beside him and give them each a board

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<sup>5</sup> Her comparison of herself here to the common figure of the doting, over-protective mother could be seen as another way in which her pedagogy challenges traditional notions of “the domestic.”

and clay” (11). Rather than compel the students to abide by a system of strict rewards and punishments, Anna attempts to allow them to direct and focus their own energies on socially productive tasks of their own design.

In the same way, she believes that Miss Dove-like enforcement of “adamantine regulations” of classroom space will stifle students’ desire and motivation to learn, and therefore favors allowing activity to generate organically within the space of the school. This philosophy is reflected in the descriptions of her students’ movement when they first enter the classroom:

I have their known words on the mat, so that when they come running in from assembly they make straight for their own, not without discussion, concentration and satisfaction. And it’s a gay performance this finding of their own words, taking time and involving noise and personal relations and actual reading, and above all communication with each other; the vital thing so often cut off in a schoolroom. Then they choose a mate and sit together, knee to knee, and hear each other their own words, making it more a matter of personal attention than one teacher could possibly do. (186)

The contrast between this school environment and the one fostered by Miss Dove could not be more striking. Whereas Miss Dove strictly prohibits communication between students working on assignments, Anna encourages it, seeing it as “vital” to the learning process. Whereas Miss Dove seats her students in well-ordered rows in order to habituate them to the “unalterable laws” of life in a “civilized” community, Anna allows her students the choice of where and with whom they move (within a framework of *some* guidance, of course) in order to suggest that they have a measure of independence and autonomy within their own, created community. Whereas Miss Dove is a firm believer in neat and tidy margins, Anna believes that “tidiness kills education” (205).

This resistance to “tidiness” infuses the novel at every turn, even down to its formal structure. The narrative is told in first person from Anna’s point of view, and for

the most part she unfolds it in a linear, chronological fashion. Yet periodically, among her own sections of narration, she interjects short excerpts from the students' prose as they're learning to write, preserving their own voices and their own integrity as writers. At times these brief interludes relate directly to the portion of the story Anna is telling, the students' words serving to provide the reader with another perspective of the episode at hand. At other times, however, the students' writing is less directly relevant to the primary story-line, seeming more a form of stream-of-conscious memory than a means of furthering her own narration. Furthermore, because they are written in the students' child-like manner, with only two to three words per line, these interludes also serve to disrupt the neat spatial order of the traditional long lines of type. The presence of these interludes, then, suggests that Anna eschews "tidiness" in her storytelling as much as in her teaching.

They also indicate one of the most significant ways in which Anna's pedagogy differs from that of the "angels in the schools" examined in Section I: she does not attempt to regulate the speech and language use of her students in the ways considered legitimate by the dominant culture (in this novel represented by the European-dominated school administration). In fact, she falls furthest "out of line" when she devises two major innovations in teaching reading and writing to the Māoris, innovations which are sharp departures from the curriculum prescribed by the administration. With regards to reading, she develops what she calls a "Key Vocabulary." She notices that the children are interested in learning how to read and write some words more than others, and that these "special" words never fail to elicit emotion and energy from the children. She eventually concludes that each of these words is "the caption of a very big inner picture";

“kiss,” for example, “is the caption of a mighty instinct: sex” (166-67). Instead of accepting the bland vocabulary of the standard curriculum (words such as “aeroplane” elicit no emotional reaction from the Māori children, for example), she wonders, “[W]hat . . . are all the other captions and pictures? What terrible power there must be in words for little children if only we could tap it and harness it!” (166-67). In her search for those other “captions,” she asks rather than tells each student which words are to be learned each day. Convinced that students will be much more effective users of language when they feel engaged and connected with it, she develops a highly personalized “key vocabulary” for each child, comprised only of those words that captivate his/her own imagination and spirit.

Her second innovation is a set of reading books that she writes and illustrates for the Māori children. Much like the Key Vocabulary, these books represent an effort to draw the Māori students into a world of literacy that they would want to claim as their own, rather than imposing on them a “foreign,” purportedly superior, world of language. Therefore, Anna’s books are filled not with Dick and Jane saying, “Go, Spot, go,” but a young protagonist named Ihaka who encounters other Māori characters and contexts. She explains her rationale for creating these books in the following way (significantly, to a school inspector who has noticed a Māori student reading one of the books): “I bring them up on Māori work first . . . They can’t bridge the gap between the *pa* [their native community] and the European school without it. They learn to read from books about themselves first, coming to love reading early. Then they go on to the imported books” (108). Anna has recognized, it seems, what Willensky has argued, that

[i]t is simply too easy to teach English as if it were the soul of civilized knowing, the heart of great literature, and the very tongue of democracy. . . .the story of its

dominion reminds us that it is also less than that. With the expansion of the British Empire, English was made an instrument of domination and silencing; it was used to regulate and police access to authority and knowledge among colonized peoples. (191)

Anna has witnessed first-hand this “dominion” of the English language; she has seen how the Māoris’ total immersion in it in the schools has indeed “dominated and silenced” them, as their young minds immediately learn to feel inferior to their white peers, who are seemingly more intelligent simply because they are more familiar users of English. With her Māori books, then, she attempts to avert “the wrench that occurs when a young coloured mind meets the respectable European book” (109).

Of course, it might be said that because she wants to devise separate reading curricula for the Maori students, Anna does not challenge, but instead reinforces, racial boundaries. What seems more accurate, however, is that she recognizes the existing cultural differences between her white and Māori students, but refuses to recognize any hierarchy between the races, even though a clear hierarchy was nevertheless constructed by colonial governing and educational policy. In other words, those racial divisions that she will *not* acknowledge are those that perpetuate instructional prejudices that ensure that the Māori will receive substandard education. Her theory on racial reconciliation, in fact, is one that rests on a true *blurring* of racial boundaries, believing that a genuine coalition between the races will only be achieved through intermarriage: “Only in blood and by blood, claims my mind, can the races mix. Yet communication of any kind must be a step towards understanding of some kind, which is the only path I know towards toleration” (7). Her emphasis here on communication and interaction among various cultures marks another sharp departure from Miss Dove’s insistence on clear margins and

the distinction she maintains between citizens who live on the “fringe” of town and those who live in the town center (Patton 101).

Perhaps even more radical still is Anna’s awareness of the degree to which race is largely a matter of social construction. At one point in the novel, one of her white students asserts that one of the Māoris has stolen something from him, even though there is no obvious reason, much less hard evidence, to hold the accused in suspicion. Upon hearing the student’s complaint, Anna thinks to herself of the racist stereotyping of the Māori, furthered by so many of her fellow Pākehā (or white people):

All Māoris are thieves and all thieves Māoris. Is that how the Board feels about our Māori school? Anyway whose side am I on in these racial interchanges? What colour am I?  
What colour am I? . . . (13)

As she here questions her own racial identity, she implicitly acknowledges that race is a category constructed out of a complex system of cultural markers, of which skin color is only one part. Thus, while Anna does recognize that there are certain factors that differentiate the Māori from the Pākehā in general (language, for example), she also recognizes that racial delineations are more complex, and therefore potentially more fluid, than the dominant white culture holds them to be. As a result of this recognition, she rejects the ethnocentric lines of school policy drawn by an educational system whose heritage rests in colonial aggression. More than any other teacher we’ve seen thus far, she confronts the problematic reality of the racial exploitation that can accompany a nation’s protection of its “domestic interior” via the school.

Thus, by recognizing that all of these issues—language, relationships to authority, modes of dress, organization of community—are culturally informed, and in resisting institutional pressures to manage them in ways that the school administration deems

appropriate, Anna implicitly sanctions and validates the Māori culture that colonial schooling had long been attempting to pull “in line” with that of the European settlers. Insofar as she won’t keep her students “in line,” then, she herself acts “out of line,” challenging the notion that the “ideal” teacher is the one who acculturates students to the beliefs and behaviors of the dominant culture. Anna is doubly out of line, however, in that she does not always embody those beliefs or enact those behaviors herself. Indeed her very challenge of the school board’s authority is itself a breach of respect for the “natural” hierarchy of capitalistic divisions of labor. To be sure, her falling out of line is not depicted as a deliberately insolent or calculatingly confrontational gesture; although she is acutely aware of how a “proper” teacher should conduct herself, she simply finds herself incapable of such comportment. When visited by the Head of her school, for example, Anna “struggles tardily” to her feet, needing to remind herself, “After all, nice teachers do stand when the Head comes in; they train their children to do so also. Nice teachers keep their records and rolls up to date too. Where are those resolutions about co-operating with the inspectors I made this morning?” (20). Similarly, when thinking about her Māori books, she remembers “A good teacher does not break out from the curriculum, even when it is deficient. A worthy teacher does not defy an order of a Director” (193).

Yet, despite these self-admonitions, Anna *is* defiant; she *does* break out from the curriculum. And she challenges the rules and boundaries imposed by the inspectors and the Director in all the ways suggested above. A final description of a typical day’s activity in her classroom indeed belies a complete dissolution of those borders and

boundaries (both literal and figurative) that would characterize the administration's definition of a "well-wrought" classroom:

The infant room rocks along like a dinghy in a storm. It nearly always has a boy in it practising on the piano, a girl dressmaking, someone looking out the window, someone looking in the window, some children sitting on the top of their small tables doing their work for lack of room on the floor, several dancing if I happen to be playing and dozens of infants talking and working and playing and laughing and crying and embracing and quarrelling and singing and making. (52-53)

The succession of progressive verb forms at the end of this passage indicates not only a lack of group consistency and cohesion that would fly in the face of the teaching conventions favored by the administration, it also suggests a scene of almost ecstatic activity, an image I admit to finding refreshing after the staid, controlled environment of classrooms like Miss Dove's or Sir's, where students learn early to sit quietly and remain "in their place." Instead, Anna recognizes that orderly borders (in terms of nation, race, or cultural "propriety") are often violent impositions on those people they serve to "reign in." In allowing her students this greater degree of mobility and freedom in the classroom, then, Anna contests many of the boundaries that the dominant culture would have its teachers draw around its domestic interior.

Nevertheless, the image of the classroom as a "dinghy in a storm" carries an undeniably negative connotation, as well. It suggests that with the complete dissolution of Miss Dove's "margins" and boundaries, some sense of the stable "home" such boundaries can create has also been dissolved. The small, fragile boat tossed about at the mercy of the winds and rain suggests the isolation and vulnerability that can result from a complete abandonment of home and the domestic cohesion it can provide. Indeed, Anna herself echoes this sentiment when she concludes the above description with two crucial questions: "Ah, yes. Here we are in a dinghy on the high ocean. Where's the port? . . .



We all seem to be heading somewhere but what's the name of the port?" (53). The suggestion of uncertainty, loneliness, and rootlessness here implies that Anna's departure from conventional "domestic tranquility" is not without its costs.

Thus, while one arc of the narrative depicts, in the ways suggested above, how liberating it can be to experience a release from the rules, regularity, and conformity imposed by the dominant culture, another equally prominent narrative arc indicates that such release can bring with it serious challenges, as well. Outside the rigid structure of the curriculum and teaching methodology enforced by the school administration, Anna finds herself free, but also alone, unsupported, and profoundly depressed. Her narrating prose is exquisitely lyrical and poetic (perhaps an indication of the artistic creativity that can be cultivated with such freedom), but melancholy, regret, fear, and feelings of inadequacy nevertheless emanate from every page. It seems clear that most of these feelings stem from a sense of isolation in her endeavor; while the Head of her school *does* validate her work with the Māori students, recognizing her brilliance and commitment as an educator, virtually no other school official does. At the beginning of the novel, the reader learns that Anna has consistently received extremely low marks from the state administration's "inspectors" who periodically visit the schools to observe and evaluate teacher performance. As Suzanne Edgar notes in her 1982 essay on Ashton-Warner, the recognition that Anna fails to receive "really means professional endorsement" and all the advantages that come therewith, including promotion and increased financial compensation (59). This lack of institutional and professional support also bears psychological weight, however, as it understandably strikes Anna as a vote of no confidence, to the point that, in the first scene of the novel, we learn that she has to

drink a half tumbler of brandy before she leaves for class each morning. By the time she gets to school, she's so tipsy that she's stepping on children's toes, and students are asking her to identify the smell on her breath.

In addition to driving her to behavior that can be physically damaging, both to herself and others, her degraded status in the eyes of the administration causes immense psychological damage as well, producing feelings of guilt, self-doubt, and loneliness. Guilt, for example, plays such a huge role in Anna's emotional existence that it assumes a personified life of its own. On the morning mentioned above, as she walks to school whistling a brandy-facilitated tune, Anna stops her song abruptly, sensing "Guilt" nearby, describing its presence as "something you find on your shoulders with tight legs clasp your neck." Though on this morning she claims, "I thought I had forgotten Guilt" (2), this suffocating force returns periodically throughout the course of the narrative, often appearing at times when the inspectors or other observers visit her classroom. Later in the novel, she will even call Guilt her "lover," indicating its extensive and highly intimate role in her life (219). The novel makes it clear that this stifling presence is one of the consequences of Anna's rebellion; Guilt comes directly out of Anna's knowledge that she does not run her classroom as the state-appointed inspectors believe that she should. Upon Guilt's first appearance in the novel, for example, she laments, "If only I had done all that inspectors had told me in the past—whenever they wanted me to, in the way they wanted me to and for the reason! If only I had been a good teacher, an obedient teacher and submissive!" (2). Because she does have some measure of connection to the domestic interior of which the school administration is representative, she feels some

compulsion to respect its authority; when she finds herself unable to act out this respect, however, the product of that compulsion is Guilt.

Another logical product of Anna's solo rebellion against the dominant culture is a overwhelming sense of self-doubt. As she finds herself virtually alone in her professional efforts, with little or no recognition or validation of her endeavors, she becomes racked with feelings of inadequacy. Unlike the sense of self-congratulation readers may perceive in teaching "heroes" like Miss Dove and Sir, and even unlike Rick's false modesty in *The Blackboard Jungle*, Anna sustains a profound uncertainty about her competency as an educator. Self-deprecating thoughts like the following are as genuine as they are continual in Anna's thinking: "Fail seems to be my nom de plume: Miss Anna Fail. Pretty" (10). The fact that Anna here incorporates failure into her very name, a primary signifier of one's identity, indicates the extent to which she has internalized and personalized the disapproval she has garnered for refusing to be kept "in line." Indeed, when she reads the "exceedingly low" grades from the inspectors, she reflects,

There can be no doubt about it: I'm a very low-ability teacher. For the whole of my teaching life inspectors have agreed on that. It's true that I have tried with everything I had in hand, giving far more of my life to my work than many a crack Infant Mistress in town . . . but here it is. Plainly I am mistaken in all I do. The inspectors are right. (84)

Therefore, just as her Māori students live with a constant, low-level fear of an invisible ghost that haunts their community, Anna herself is continually haunted by shades of disapproval, which she names the "Phantom of the Profession" (210). These shades are ever-present in her classroom, lurking about and whispering to her that her teaching efforts are misguided, causing her to question all that she does, even when she is not being observed: "What will they think of the reading scheme I am making? And the

design of the current rhythm on the blackboard in place of a time-table?" (210). Thus, even as she resists acting as the Foulcauldian watch-guard of her students, she cannot escape the feeling of being under watch herself, provoking these feelings of fundamental insecurity and incompetence.

In fact, the questions she poses above are exemplary of a rhetorical quirk in Anna's narrative style that both betrays and underscores her constant feelings of self-doubt. For a first-person expository prose narrative, the novel is unusually full of questions. It is true that she does tell the story in present tense, so she would not have the benefit of hindsight to answer or explain all the questions that would likely arise in any dedicated teacher's mind as s/he went about the daily practice of teaching. Nevertheless, there are to be found countless numbers of paragraphs in which half of the sentences are questions, questions that strike at the very heart of her work and existence as a teacher. She poses the following string of impassioned queries, for example, on the morning that we first see her in the classroom:

Why waste a half-tumbler of brandy in the morning in order to lose the past when you lose it among the Little Ones anyway? Is this drinking necessary? After all I have only to cross the paddock through the trees and here I am saved. Why is the setting out so hard? Do I actually want memory, as much as it wants me?" (6)

Similar is another series of questions that she poses after a typical morning of dealing with energetic children:

In time they take things into their own hands. Two fight, two embrace, some draw, some move to the sand-container and many sneak outside. All this energy, I think! Why can't I use it? Why must I curb it? Ah, if only I had some courage I'd change it all!

Where is the way, anyhow? How do you do it? (44)

The tone and mood established by the rhetorical style of the above passages are typical of the entire first section of the book; they communicate a fundamental uncertainty about

her ability to teach and her pedagogical methodologies—an uncertainty that we have not seen in any of the teachers of the previous three novels. While an undercurrent of self-doubt may have been implicit in the prior novels, Anna’s outright battles with the school administrators—and with the omnipresent “Phantom of the Profession”—seem to bring this uncertainty to the very forefront of her thinking and her narration in *Spinster*.

Another feature of this narrator’s rhetorical style that serves to highlight the element of uncertainty in her character is her periodic repetition of entire phrases and sentences. This idiosyncrasy occurs especially at those times when she’s interacting with other teachers, headmasters, or inspectors, or at those times when she’s doubting an aspect of her teaching style. For example, she discovers that a new teacher at her school, of whom she disapproves for his harsh, disciplinarian style, has severely chastized the youngest son of one of the Māori families for not “giving ear” to him. Anna challenges, ““The Tamatis are not built to obey God or Man . . . What makes you think they can obey you? What makes you think they can obey you?” (15). Similarly, when she discusses the reason that she resists making fixed lesson plans, she explains to the reader, “I plan [for class], but this is the surest way not to do a thing. Some other deeper mysterious plan takes over. [. . .] And I find myself wishing that I was more accessible to this thing so that it could substitute for the brain I haven’t got. The brain I haven’t got” (28). Aside from the self-loathing evident in the actual content of this last remark, her manner of echoing the final segment of it additionally suggests a severe lack of self-confidence; in this passage and the many others like it, the tendency to repeat certain phrases suggests that Anna is so uncertain of her own thoughts and ideas that she must repeat them in order to persuade herself of their truth or validity.

A final emotional cost that Anna must incur because of her resistance to the dominant culture is a grave sense of isolation and loneliness. As was noted above, her resistance degrades her in the ranks of the profession, so that Anna works in what is essentially a teaching community of one (two, if you count the school's Headmaster). Therefore, Anna has virtually no one with whom she feels she shares similar educational goals, and furthermore, she has no one with whom she can share the daily triumphs and frustrations of teaching. She despises this loneliness, but calls it the "price of walking alone" (210).

Midway through the novel, she does in fact gain favor with one high-ranking inspector, Mr. Abercrombie, who notices with great approval her Māori books. This inspector makes arrangements to provide Anna with a typewriter and other materials to facilitate her creation of the books. He returns to the school several times to talk with her about her ideas on teaching, and he occasionally brings other high-ranking officials, such as other administrators or professors from nearby teaching colleges, to view Anna's classroom with him. As she grows to trust Mr. Abercrombie and his efforts to support her work, Anna allows herself to believe that his increasingly frequent visits signify an increasing legitimacy of her teaching. She daydreams to herself: "I'm the coming Infant Mistress of New Zealand. I am that now; in my own view. [. . .] [In autumn] I'll be recognized for what I am. I might even be invited to lecture at the Teacher's Training College on Māori Infant Method. And then I will be part of the world again, part of country again and among my own kind" (221). The last sentence of this passage expresses the severe isolation and disconnectedness that she has experienced during her years of fighting the school system's "vile prejudices" against the Māori. Significantly,

she feels isolated not only from her “own kind” (other teachers, I believe she means), but also from her “country.” I find this reference very telling, for it seems to be an explicit recognition of the close relationship between teaching and the political project of protecting national or “domestic” interests. I believe that it is her resistance to employing her teaching in the service of the domestic interior’s dominant culture that prevents her from feeling “at home” in her own country.

Thus, feeling torn between her allegiance to the “home”land she was born into, and her desire to resist the “vile prejudices” that that land’s dominant culture would have her perpetuate, the character of Anna is depicted as a self that is thoroughly divided. Lacking a space that she can call a true domestic center, she lacks the benefits—focus, community, and companionship, for example—that such “centering” can provide. Moreover, without such centering, she experiences a severe lack of personal coherence and consistency<sup>6</sup>, a vague notion that can best be described in Anna’s own words, as she describes her existence in the classroom: “I’ve mislaid who I am. Sensuously and accurately I vibrate and respond to the multifold touch of my Little Ones . . . I am made of their thoughts and their feelings. I am composed of sixty-odd different pieces of personality. I don’t know what I have been saying or what I will say next, and little of what I am saying at the time” (21-22). While the picture Anna paints of herself here likely rings true with the many teachers who have similarly tried to negotiate the complex network of demands on their time and energies, there is nevertheless something disturbing—and perhaps even dangerous—about completely “mislay[ing]” who one is.

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<sup>6</sup> Critics have noticed this lack of a centered narrating consciousness in other Ashton-Warner works, as well. In a review of the biographical piece, *Myself*, for instance, reviewer Elizabeth Janeway notes that the text is a “curiously unnerving document, confessional in its candor at times, but lacking a coherent center. In spite of the title, that missing center is the author’s own sense of herself” (53).

Of course, the idea of identity as essentially fragmented is a notion that many recent cultural critics and postmodern thinkers have celebrated, insofar as it allows for ambiguity and diversity both within the self and within human cultures. Powerful as such benefits may be, I would nevertheless suggest that experiencing severe fragmentation, such as Anna experiences here, may produce a significant measure of pain that stands to overshadow the potentially liberating effects of fragmentation.<sup>7</sup> This certainly seems to be the case for Anna, for at a moment when she is looking out over her classroom, “marvel[ing] at the variation here; at the multitudinous facets of this infant-room soul,” she reflects, “It is like the divisions in me. [ . . . ] All the kaleidoscopic personality revolving, flashing irrelevant facets.” Yet a few lines later she asks, “can you call this cohesion?” and admits that she “longs for one vast rain to encompass my all. To embrace my all” (61). Though there are undoubtedly costs, as we saw with Miss Dove, of rigorously maintaining the boundaries of the “self”—of constantly, and sometimes artificially, imposing rigid definitions of who one is and isn’t—we see in Anna a danger of “selfhood” of the opposite extreme. Caught in national and professional “homes” that are in many ways inhospitable to her personal values, Anna can find no comfortable space in which her self, in its entirety, can be “encompassed” and “embraced.”

One of the dangers of living without a coherent notion of who she is and isn’t is that Anna, as she mentions in the passages above, becomes susceptible to assuming

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<sup>7</sup> Lynne Layton’s essay, “Trauma, Gender Identity and Sexuality: Discourses of Fragmentation,” is an insightful reflection on these two views of identity fragmentation. Herself a practicing psychoanalytic clinician, Layton speaks to the pain she has witnessed in patients suffering from severe fragmentation, even while she finds compelling the work of poststructuralist thinkers such as Judith Butler, Constance Penley, E. Ann Kaplan, and Ellen G. Friedman, who “posit the fragmentation of the subject as a strategy of resistance and/or a guarantee of indeterminacy” (106). She concludes that “we must recognize . . . that even our experiences of diversity are rife with pain because there are so many external and internal attempts to silence them. The omission of that pain in much of postmodern theory is meaningful and needs to be explored” (115).



without deliberation or choice the mindsets and personalities of other people—her very young students, in particular. As Dennis McEldowney has observed in “Sylvia Ashton-Warner: A Problem of Grounding,” “the adult characters impinge on, bruise, Anna; she retreats to the children and finds them identically bruised” (237). Indeed, in the very first scene of the novel, which occurs after she has been teaching for some time and after she has already suffered the pain and disillusionment of being scored poorly by the state inspectors, she confesses, “But at night when I am in my slim bed, away from the chaos and hilarity of my infant-room, it is I who am the Little One” (1). What she most relates to in her students, it seems, is their sense of vulnerability, their fear of being overpowered by forces stronger than they are. For example, when the inspectors come again to evaluate her classroom, she describes the experience as her “nightmare”:

But now, seeing him standing, the living nightmare, calm and grey and tall, and orderly, efficient and correct, within my rocking dinghy, I am all vulnerability. I am reminded, at the melancholy sight of an Inspector within my doorway, once and for all, that I am indeed without covering, either of the mind or in the profession. Without epidermis. [. . .] I am as uncovered as any other naïve soul in the infant room. (103-4)

We might recall that the protagonists of Section I, when faced with similar experiences of vulnerability, masked their feelings of fear with exaggerated assertions of authority, suggesting that the traditional teacher “persona” requires an unhealthy repression or denial of that part of the self that identifies with the children/students. In this sense, readers may find something terribly authentic and courageous in Anna’s description of her childlike response to a situation in which she feels threatened. Anna is able, in a way that Rick Dadier, Sir and Miss Dove are not, to acknowledge her experience of feeling weak and “uncovered” by fear; she boldly claims, rather than represses, the childlike

sensation of being emotionally raw and highly susceptible to the criticism and condescension of others.

For Anna, though, the problem lies in the fact that her rebellion against the domestic interior leaves her *so* isolated and wounded that she sometimes moves from being *childlike* to *childish*. There are times, that is, when she not only feels like a child, but also acts like one, weeping profusely at a minor insult or criticism, for example, or even slipping into childish language sometimes. For instance, one day when she tries to tell the story of Little Red Riding Hood to her class, the students soon begin to interject with their own contributions to the story: “In no time I have lost the rights to the story. It is told emphatically and graphically and severally in different mediums of English and on various pitches, with argument and excitement and stand-up actions . . . until, near the end, out of pride alone, I determine to battle my way back into it. After all it was my story and I had it first” (83). While I am tempted to praise this teacher’s high valuation of community through diversity (via her initial tolerance of the communal storytelling), the fact remains that she almost allows her sense of autonomy to be dissipated among the multitude of students; she literally comes close to ceding her own voice to them. Thus, when she reflects on the incident, she has almost regressed entirely to a child’s level, assuming a voice that is more authentically her students’ than her own: “But looking back, I am aggrieved at the state of my story. It was my story. I had it first. But those kids bust it. [. . .] But those kids bust it. For notheen” (84). In this way, her experience of a fragmented personality seems to me more regressive than liberating (the final scene of the novel, which I will discuss shortly, reinforces this reading). Having failed to develop an “epidermis” and the sense of selfhood and independence that such encasement

can provide, Anna lacks a certain maturity necessary to negotiate the demands of living in a ethically complicated adult world. Yet far from “blaming” Anna for this lack of maturity, I maintain that her exceptionally fragmented personality is the consequence of being unable to find a space in which she can comfortably center her self and her values, for the nation and profession that she would like to call “home” are actually quite *inhospitable*.

Nevertheless, despite all the tremendous personal costs discussed above, Anna endures for a long while in her efforts to reform the practice of teaching Māori students. For a brief time, as mentioned above, she even receives a measure of institutional support and recognition for those efforts. She is befriended by the high-ranking inspector, Mr. Abercrombie, who is so convinced of the value of her Maori books that he arranges to provide her with additional materials that she does not have to purchase with her own money. Far more valuable to Anna than the material worth of his support, however, is the psychological benefit of feeling that she has an ally in her endeavor—and not just any ally, but one who is directly affiliated with the state educational offices. Finally, it seems, she may be able to reconcile her own pedagogical convictions with those held by a board of education purportedly interested in protecting the same domestic interior that she inhabits. Finally, she believes, she will not have to live in fear of the “Phantom of the Profession,” for her teaching practices will no longer be seen as so wildly “out of line” with conventional professional standards. She is even able to relax when the next set of inspectors arrives to evaluate her teaching performance. Believing Mr. Abercrombie’s support of her reading initiatives to be a sanction of her pedagogy as a whole, she feels

confident that her poor marks will be significantly improved in the next evaluation period.<sup>8</sup>

Before the grades are delivered to her house, however, the Head of her school asks that she hand them over to him without first looking at them herself. It is implied that this request is one intended to protect Anna; in his position as headmaster, he had likely already been informed of the substance of the inspectors' report, and as her one consistently supportive colleague (and supervisor), he has little concern for whether her marks are improved or not. But Anna does, and caught up in her grand fantasies of finally receiving institutional approval, she disregards the headmaster's wishes and steams open the envelope containing the report so that she can read its contents before passing them along to the Head. The bitter disappointment they bring is palpable:

I burst into tears of fulfillment before I open [the envelope] so that when I do I can't see. I brush my eyes clear and hold it further back. And when I do finally make out the content I think for a few moments it must be the tears blurring it still, because what I read is that there has been no increase of grading whatever. (233)

The receipt of the latest round of poor marks breaks what little is left of Anna's passionate commitment to educational reform. As McEldowney suggests, the lesson she learns "is perhaps that those within the established order will in the end inevitably betray the one outside" (237). As a result, the self-doubt she had felt in the first portions of the novel comes flooding back in: "[The Senior inspector] is satisfied that I am not a good teacher, if indeed he considers me a teacher at all. I don't. I'm satisfied that I am no more than a vague incompetent artist, inadvertently and regrettably, let loose among

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<sup>8</sup> The fact that she receives "marks" from her superiors indicates another way in which her experience of school parallels that of her students. Indeed, her anxious anticipation of the next series of evaluations is nothing if not the apprehension of a schoolchild awaiting a report card she must take home to her parents.

children; if not a lunatic of the uncertifiable class. Or a five-year-old with long legs. After all there is only a very fine line between the three” (241).

With Anna beset by these old, familiar pains of disappointment and isolation, the novel rapidly unfolds into a quick, disheartening narrative resolution. After receiving the low marks, she buys a one-way ticket to leave New Zealand, a last resort of which she had often dreamed during her darkest moments of feeling tired, isolated, or defeated. She does not consult with the headmaster before making this decision, and doesn’t even inform him of it until just before she leaves the country. She literally buries her Maori books and her reading scheme in her garden, and packs her things to return to Eugene, a lover she had left years earlier in order to pursue her dream of teaching. What she will do when she returns to him is not specified, though there is a suggestion that she will go to work washing clothes in a laundry.<sup>9</sup> The final lines of the novel indicate that she has reached Eugene, and is lying with her head in his lap, listening to his soothing words of reassurance. What the reader is to make of this hasty conclusion is not altogether clear. On the one hand, a return to the comforting arms of a lover seems a wholly positive change for this person who had endured such prolonged feelings of isolation and rejection. Yet there is also an unmistakable sense of melancholy and loss in the last several pages of the novel. The departure of a committed, devoted teacher is certainly regrettable for the school and for the future students of that school. Even more

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<sup>9</sup> This, too, was a common fantasy for her when she despaired of teaching. Early in the novel, for instance, she had remarked, “No other job in the world could possibly dispossess one so completely as this job of teaching. You could stand all day in a laundry, for instance, still in possession of your mind. But this teaching utterly obliterates you” (8). It could be noted that the way in which Anna here romanticizes the blue-collar labor of the working class parallels the way in which colonial settlers often romanticize indigenous peoples. This class romanticization is also reminiscent of Sir’s description of the hearty women “folk” on the bus in the first scene of *To Sir, With Love*.

disheartening, though, is the sense of profound personal loss Anna experiences as she abandons her once-fervid passion for teaching.

Indeed, a number of details in the final scenes support the idea that for Anna, this narrative resolution is filled with more disappointment than satisfaction. Her farewell scene, for example, is a striking contrast to the triumphant conclusions of more traditional teacher-hero novels. There's no graduation dance serenade here, no gifts and hugs and smiles showered on the teacher by her loving students. In fact, there are no students present at all; if Anna even bids them a formal farewell, the reader isn't given access to the scene. Instead, it is Anna who delivers a speech to the flowers of her garden. She addresses the inhuman plants outside her house as "Ladies and gentlemen," and proceeds to offer a few words that are as genuine and personal as a generic Academy Award acceptance speech. As she leaves, she imagines "sensational clapping" and the flowers singing "For she's a jolly good fellow" (245). Insofar as she has talked to these flowers throughout the novel and constructed for herself a sustained metaphor between their lives and her own, it is conceivable that there *is* a measure of meaning for Anna in this final scene of communicating with them. Yet I maintain that an imagined chorus of praise from a bed of inhuman flowers is nevertheless a far cry from the human love and devotion conferred on the teaching heroes of other novels. Though Anna had never attempted to elicit her students' loyalty in the same way as many of these other heroes (that is, via the students' mimicking of her beliefs and behaviors), she had directed virtually all of her energies to the improvement of their education; thus their absence from the final pages suggests that her work and energies have been aborted, not fulfilled.

Similarly, her return to Eugene is not the passionate reunification scene of two former lovers, but more the scene of a parent comforting a wounded, weeping child. If, in earlier episodes, Anna had shown a tendency to regress to the speech and behavior patterns of her students, in this scene, she is rendered completely child-like, Eugene having taken over the role she once played for her students. He coos to her, “What is it, what is it, Little One?” and in the final line of the novel, he calms her by saying, “There . . . there . . . look at my pretty girl,” two refrains she had used with her infants throughout the entire novel—only now, it is Anna who is the “Little One” (245-46). This parallel suggests that her experience as a teacher has not been one of personal development and fulfillment, but rather one of growth stunted, and even reversed. Her relationship with school officials has infantilized her to the point that now *she* is the “little one.” Thus, though she assures her flowers in the aforementioned farewell speech, that it is “a blessed rest to be going backward rather than forward!” (244), I remain unconvinced that regression could be in any way satisfying for this woman who had once been so committed to moving forward in the education of New Zealand students.

In my efforts to highlight this poignancy of Anna’s final move and the novel’s dénouement, however, my aim is not to render either her character or her situation as melodramatically pathetic. Indeed, I strongly disagree with critic Ruth Blackman, who asserted in her 1959 review of the novel that “in depicting the mental and emotional frustration of this title character, [Ashton-Warner] makes her so much a case-book spinster that she fails to hold our sympathy” (7). Blackman is correct in her identification of a certain emotional indulgence in Ashton-Warner’s impressionistic prose, yet I maintain that it is through such psychological extravagance that the reader learns how

unconventional Anna is, both as a teacher and as a “spinster”—and I would further argue that it is precisely this unconventional nature that engages rather than repels the reader’s sympathy. For example, in a passage that details Anna’s thoughts as she accompanies her class on an autumn walk (obviously before she has received the new evaluations), she watches the students sing, dance, and play in heaps of dried leaves, and she thinks to herself:

There’s a loud rustle abroad and a wildness that I love, and a force of expression in their play that is the ‘true voice of feeling.’ And although I know that this sort of thing has lost me my professional status and severed me finally from my kind I feel at last that the price I have paid for it in tears and disgrace and brandy and loneliness, in deprivation and tragedy, is a small price; if it can be called one at all. (214)

One can see in a passage such as this how a reader like Blackman might become exasperated with what seems to be an over-dramatic self-involvement in the character of the protagonist.<sup>10</sup> Yet if we suppose that Anna’s thoughts here are genuine, rather than contrived or deliberately melodramatic, we can more clearly understand the tremendous dilemma in which teachers such as Anna might find themselves. Even if we grant that the rewards of teaching true to one’s convictions are substantial, Anna’s litany of “prices” at the end of the passage nevertheless amounts to a tab that is by no means “small.” Moreover, because we see here that for the sake of ethical and meaningful teaching, Anna is willing to endure the rather considerable costs of rebelling against the conventions of the school inspectors, we are able to better appreciate how extreme those costs must have become by the time of the evaluations—so extreme, it seems, that she would finally allow

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<sup>10</sup> Blackman is by no means alone in this assessment. In “Sylvia Ashton-Warner,” Suzanne Edgar cites Fleur Adcock, who wrote in an introduction to a late edition of *Spinster* “that sentimentality and melodrama occasionally mar Warner’s work.” Though Edgar herself concludes that “minor flaws do not spoil the overall originality” of the text, she does agree that the novel in fact contains a few such stylistic “lapses” (60).



herself to be driven from a profession she once found so rewarding. In this way, I believe the emotional wrangling witnessed in passages such as the one above serves to heighten rather than trivialize the problematic nature of the novel's resolution.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of that resolution is one that happens to be prefigured in the list of "costs" cited in the passage above. Anna's statement that her unconventional teaching practices have "severed [her] finally from [her] kind" foreshadows some very telling comments she will offer in the last pages of the novel regarding the notion of home. After receiving her low scores from the state inspectors, she realizes, "Suddenly I do not want to see any more of this dinghy," and is thus left to consider where to go and what to do now (240). She reflects,

I suppose I had better go home now; if you can call it home. Have I a home? The most important thing in life, one of them, so Eugene said, was a home and background. Where is my home and background? Am I like Paul without them? I do not think I am like Paul without them. 'Reverence for conscience' is my home and background. It's just that I often lose sight of it. (241)

I believe Anna's uncertainty here about the location—and even the very existence—of her home is a direct result of the tension encountered by teachers who are uncomfortable with the expectation that they serve the interests of the national "domestic interior" in the space of the classroom. What this novel seems to illustrate, of course, is that a severe disjunction occurs when the teacher's personal "home" that is "reverence for conscience" does not fall in line with the national "home" that is the dominant culture of the place in which s/he physically lives. The solution for Anna, finally unable to find a "home" within the school system in which she worked, its confining space being too small to accommodate her "reverence for conscience," is to enter a state of voluntary exile—an act, as we have seen, that is not without its own considerable cost.

Thus, if the teachers examined in Section I foster a domestic tranquility that seems rather precarious, the teacher in this novel exposes the turbulence that lies just beneath the surface of that tranquility, demonstrating in sometimes dramatic fashion the unrest that can erupt from the restrictiveness with which that tranquility is bought. As we have seen, however, Anna's experience does not only undermine the "tranquility" side of the "domestic tranquility" equation; her story leads readers to question the very nature of "the domestic" itself. Anna yearns for some verification of her legitimacy within the state-supported educational system because she very understandably needs to feel that her work has validity among a larger community of educators. Yet the system from which she seeks acceptance is one she neither respects or admires; in this sense, she finds the "home" of her country's dominant culture extremely *inhospitable* to her personal beliefs and pedagogical values. At the same time, though, she finds the isolation of her solitary rebellion against the dominant culture no more welcoming or sustaining than the culture itself. Thus stranded in a kind of domestic wasteland in New Zealand, Anna is ultimately displaced to a new home in which she's driven to surrender her most ardent passions and dreams, a narrative resolution that may leave readers, with her, questioning whether "home," in any form of its conventional sense, even exists at all.

Similarly dis-placed is the (in)famous heroine of Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. Though Anna leaves the teaching profession willingly and Brodie is forced out against her wishes, many of the same issues of teaching and domesticity are raised in Spark's novel, with equally unsettling consequences for its protagonist and its readers.

## ***The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie***

*“Who is the greatest Italian painter?”*

*“Leonardo da Vinci, Miss Brodie.”*

*“That is incorrect. The answer is Giotto, he is my favourite.”*

—From *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*

Muriel Spark’s most well-known novel, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, was first published in the *New Yorker* in 1961. It was later produced as a play and a movie, a film so well-loved in the United States that Maggie Smith earned a Best Actress Oscar for her performance as Brodie. (The film was also nominated for three Golden Globe Awards.) The plot of the novel is thus by now well-known. The story is set in Spark’s hometown of Edinburgh in the 1930’s, and it centers around Jean Brodie, a middle-aged, unmarried woman teaching at the Marcia Blaine School for Girls. Her eccentric teaching includes telling her classes stories of her former lover, fallen in World War I, as well as relating tales of her European travels, particularly those to Italy, where she became enamoured of Mussolini’s fascism. She also chooses a select group of students who form the “Brodie set,” girls on whom she particularly dotes, inviting them regularly to tea at her house and taking them on weekend outings around the city. Over these girls Brodie has enormous influence, devoting as she does the “prime” of her life to molding them into what she considers passionate and cultured young women. Though all of the girls are initially flattered to be members of the set, one of them, Sandy, later begins to begrudge Brodie’s unchecked influence over the group. Though sworn to secrecy about the happenings in the group, and bound by an unspoken oath of loyalty to their teacher, Sandy ultimately reports to the school’s headmistress that Brodie is teaching fascism, and Brodie is permanently dismissed from her position. Vilified by some critics and heroized by others, Miss Brodie is an elusive figure, at once charmingly seductive, pathetically

ridiculous, and subtly dangerous. This leaves much to be said about the nature of her persona and the effects of her teaching.<sup>11</sup> What I would like to focus on here, however, are the ways in which the figure of Miss Brodie magnifies and exaggerates two of the issues of domesticity discussed in Section I: the issue of maintaining distinctively gendered spheres, and the issue of schooling as a means of social reproduction.

First, I would suggest, the character of Miss Brodie is one that blurs traditional deliniations between the masculine and the feminine, revealing some of the same tensions that surface in *The Blackboard Jungle*, for instance. Unlike *The Blackboard Jungle*, however, which ultimately cannot sustain the tension and resorts to a strict re-definition of proper roles and behaviors for men and women, the tension is withheld consistently in the character of Miss Brodie, a fact which, I contest, leads to her ultimate dismissal from her teaching post. If Rick Dadier ultimately denies the “feminine” aspects of public schoolteaching and supplants them with “masculine” efforts to domesticate and tame his students, Miss Brodie attempts to deny neither the “masculine” nor “feminine” aspects of her professional life—or her personal life, for that matter. Because she is finally dismissed from her teaching post, I would argue, the character of Brodie exposes the cultural impulse to maintain a polarity between the masculine and the feminine. In this sense, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* magnifies the repressive nature of the gender dynamics depicted as essential to “domestic tranquility” within the schools of Section I.

Like the male teachers in *The Blackboard Jungle* who are described in feminine terms, Miss Brodie is presented as a character who blurs the lines between the masculine and the feminine, even in regards to her appearance. Early in the novel, this ambiguity is

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<sup>11</sup> Indeed, much has *already* been said about Miss Brodie. See Auerbach, Bower, Dobie, Keroes, Laffin, Lodge, Montgomery, and Whitely for various discussions of her character.

suggested in a student's observation of her teacher: "Some days it seemed to Sandy that Miss Brodie's chest was flat, no bulges at all, but straight as her back. On other days her chest was breast-shaped and large, very noticeable" (18). This ambiguity is carried throughout the narrative, as Brodie is frequently described as possessing great feminine sexual attractiveness, but is also frequently noted for her "dark Roman profile," a term that associates her with the distinctly masculine enterprises of empire, nobility, and political power.

Indeed, not only in her appearance does this gender ambiguity surface, but also in her interests, her pedagogy, and her general demeanor. In one sense, Brodie is fully the doting mother, teaching her "girls" the order of feminine propriety and schooling them in feminine niceties. When she sees one of her students with her sleeves rolled up, she orders the student to "roll them down at once, we are civilized beings" (20). She counsels that windows must be open no more than six inches—"more is vulgar" (68). And she urges her set that they "must learn to cultivate an expression of composure. It is one of the best assets of a woman, an expression of composure, come foul, come fair" (33-34). In all of these ways, Brodie is the (somewhat ludicrous) picture of Victorian domesticity, the elegant and cultured "angel of the house" who knows all rules of propriety, as well as the proper carriage befitting a "lady," and who teaches her female children likewise.

In another sense, however, her interests in politics, religion, and travel place her squarely in the realm of the public sphere, which, as has already been noted, is traditionally gendered masculine. The narrator even notes that "those of Miss Brodie's kind were great talkers and feminists and, like most feminists, talked to men as man-to-

man” (64). This masculine persona with which she is so comfortable in her social relations carries over into the form of authority she exerts over her students at Marcia Blaine. Related to the image of her “dark Roman profile” noted above, the narrator’s summary of Brodie’s students’ estimation of her teaching reveals that they perceive it to embody a very masculine quality: “The Brodie set did not for a moment doubt that [Brodie] would prevail [over the headmistress’s efforts to convince Brodie to resign]. As soon expect Julius Caesar to apply for a job at a crank school as Miss Brodie. She would never resign. If the authorities wanted to get rid of her she would have to be assassinated” (16). The use of the word “assassinated,” as well as the reference to Julius Ceasar, connotes that Miss Brodie is in a position of political power—a position that, even at this point in the twentieth century, would most likely be held by a man.<sup>12</sup> This connection is made even more explicitly by the student who ultimately “betrays” Brodie to the headmistress: “It occurred to Sandy, there at the end of the Middle Meadow Walk, that the Brodie set was Miss Brodie’s fascisti, not to the naked eye, marching along, but all knit together for her need and in another way, marching along” (47). This comparison constructs an explicit parallel between Brodie and Mussolini, the political figure she so admires, in terms of the distinctly masculine way in which they command the attention of their followers (or students).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> A similar parallel is drawn to religious power. When one of the Brodie set declines an invitation to accompany Miss Brodie on a weekend outing, saying that she has to attend “a social,” Miss Brodie retorts, “‘Social what?’” The narrator notes that Brodie “always made difficulties about words when she scented heresy” (91). The use of the word “heresy” suggests that Miss Brodie has established her own “church”—her own form of masculine religious authority.

<sup>13</sup> Anne L. Bower has noted in “The Narrative Structure of Muriel Spark’s *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*” that “this historical period, in which European fascism developed, is a perfect backdrop against which to display Jean Brodie’s eccentric authoritarianism” (497). In addition to accentuating Brodie’s “eccentric authoritarianism,” I would argue, the novel’s setting in the context of fascism also seems fitting insofar as the totalitarian regimes of the 1930’s were built on an extreme version of masculine political power, but at the same time elevated and glorified the cult of the domestic, urging women to further national interests by

Brodie is also differentiated from other women at the school in that she is depicted as a woman who displays an interest in sex. Two of her colleagues, Mr. Lloyd and Mr. Lowther, fall “a little” in love with Miss Brodie, because “they found in her the only sex-bestirred object in their daily environment” (71). Insofar as remnants of the Victorian idealization of women’s chastity and sexual purity carried over into the twentieth century, this seems to indicate another way in which Brodie is masculinized: she’s unashamed to claim a sexual nature.<sup>14</sup> In fact, it is this aspect of her character that is most often vilified in critical discussions of the novel: her single most treacherous mistake in the eyes of most readers is implicitly setting up one of her students to act as her proxy in a love affair with Teddy Lloyd, the married art teacher with whom Brodie is in love, but with whom she will not allow herself to become involved. While I would hasten to agree that such scheming is clearly perverse and an obvious abuse of pedagogical authority, I find it curious that there has been little discussion of the measure of responsibility due to Mr. Lloyd himself. Even if Miss Brodie encourages the affair, he is ultimately the one who actively takes advantage of his authority over the 16-year-old student. Moreover, Brodie is never shown to explicitly arrange the affair at all. When the girls begin to go over to Mr. Lloyd’s house to pose for his paintings (at *his* invitation), Brodie does pump them for information concerning Lloyd, his wife, his house, and so forth—perhaps implicitly encouraging them to return, in order to bring more reports and further win her favor. But her interest in the visits is sparked only when she hears that his

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giving birth to sons who would later carry on the regime. Perhaps it was this blending of polarized masculinity and femininity that Miss Brodie, so gender bending herself, found so appealing in fascism.

<sup>14</sup> Jo Keroes has argued quite persuasively that “Miss Brodie is Miss Dove re-sexualized, reimagined as a real woman alive in a real and changing world” (33).

paintings of the girls resemble her, suggesting that her “plot” or “scheme” is largely a response to *his* initiative.

This dynamic is foreshadowed in an earlier incident with the music teacher, Mr. Lowther. Brodie brings her girls to his class for their music lesson, and Lowther begins to twist the blonde curls of a student’s hair in an attempt to win Brodie’s attention: “He twitched her ringlets and looked at Miss Brodie like a child showing off its tricks and almost as if testing Miss Brodie to see if she were at all willing to conspire in his un-Edinburgh conduct” (35). An obvious precursor to the affair between Mr. Lloyd and another member of the Brodie set, this scene serves to illustrate the role Miss Brodie has in permitting, if not facilitating and encouraging, inappropriate relations between her female students and their male teachers. Here again, however, it is the man who initiates inappropriate sexual advances towards the minor, even though most readers have placed solely on Brodie the burden of moral culpability. Though I in no way wish to excuse her of her failure to intervene and put a stop to these flirtations-by-proxy, I find it telling that the men’s accountability in these scenes has been largely overlooked, while Brodie’s tacit approval of their advances has been damned quite stringently—as if readers have shrugged and said, “Boys will be boys, but that Miss Brodie, she should have known better.”

The character of Brodie thus resists easy gender classification. She’s undeniably feminine, but she’s also the embodiment of masculine ambition and power, as well as sexual desire. This duality might not have been so problematic for Brodie, had she not held a position as a teacher. Indeed, the narrator specifically notes that:

There were legions of her kind during the nineteen-thirties, women from the age of thirty and upward, who crowded their war-bereaved spinsterhood with voyages



of discovery into new ideas and energetic practices in art or social welfare, education or religion. The progressive spinsters of Edinburgh did not teach in schools, especially in schools of traditional character like Marcia Blaine's School for Girls. It was in this that Miss Brodie was, as the rest of the staff spinsterhood put it, a trifle out of place. (63)

If the masculine space of the vocational school in *The Blackboard Jungle* was no place for women, and especially no place for women-like men, the feminine space of the Marcia Blaine School for Girls proves to be no place for men, and especially no place for men-like women: independent, engaged with the public world, and unmarried (and therefore not sexually contained). Brodie's ultimate dismissal from her teaching post thus highlights the tendency of the dominant culture to insist upon highly defined and distinguishable gender roles, especially within the space of the school, where issues of domesticity and domestication (like those discussed in Section I) had already begun to blur gender lines. This fact leaves little room for the "progressive spinsters," like Brodie, who might have seen teaching as their opportunity to participate in the life of the public sphere and to contribute to social betterment. As Lynne Joyrich has noted in "Give Me a Girl at an Impressionable Age and She is Mine for Life: Jean Brodie as Pedagogical Primer," a 1995 essay on the novel and its film adaptation,

Caught within this structure as it is represented in the text, women's positions are extremely limited (in Jean's words, women's roles are to 'serve, suffer, and sacrifice'). They are to be mothers and daughters (dutifully reproducing this imperialist system of social and sexual 'intercourse'), wives or mistresses (in other words, either private property—the dismal prospect of marrying Mr. Lowther—or public possessions—'famous for sex'). (49-50)

Within this structure, of course, there is little room for women to be independent agents of social activism in the public sphere of the school. Miss Brodie tries, in her own eccentric way, to be such an agent, but as an amalgam of "feminine" romanticism and propriety and "masculine" politics and desire, there is no place for her within the school.

If, in *Spinster*, Anna enters a voluntary state of exile because the space of her school is too confining, Brodie is *involuntarily* exiled for precisely the same reason. As Keroes summarizes, “As she resists the constraints her world imposes on her, it must in turn resist her efforts (33). What the character of Miss Brodie seems to illustrate, then, is the degree to which women teachers must be *mother/teachers*, strictly adhering to standards of *feminine* domesticity, in order to maintain their positions within the public sphere of the school.

In addition to echoing and intensifying the gender issues raised in Section I, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* also returns to the idea of employing the school as a means for reproducing the domestic interior. Brodie’s efforts to mold her “set” in her own image recalls one of the major motivations behind the American common school movement, suggested in Section I: the urge to produce a group of homogeneous citizens that will preserve the social and cultural status quo. To again refer to Joyrich,

Jean refers to the school as an education factory. . . . [T]his factory produces not only gendered subjects but also national and imperial ones. Jean’s interpellation of her students as ‘civilized beings,’ ‘Europeans’ rather than ignorant and ‘petty provincials,’ indicates the way in which the entire system of British schooling was devoted to reproducing an imperialist cultural heritage as well as a system of gendered exchange. (49)

In her efforts to instill in her “girls” her own personal set of moral, political, and aesthetic values, then, Brodie is very much like Miss Dove and Sir in Section I. In this novel, however, the whole notion of the school being a site for social reproduction is exaggerated to the point of distortion, rendering that notion rather repulsive—even if not essentially different from what we saw in Section I. Thus, the reason Brodie is expelled from teaching, while Dove and Sir are heroized, may not be simply because she tries to “reproduce” herself and her cultural heritage; it may be because she does so in such a

blatant manner. While it must be said that some of her teachings are indeed dangerous,<sup>15</sup> and therefore her dismissal well-founded, her exile from teaching might also be motivated in part by the fact that her character lays bare the reality of how absurd, and eventually how destructive, it can be to use the school solely to “reproduce” culture. In other words, because this notion of schooling as social reproduction is so exaggerated in Brodie’s character, this novel makes explicit the questions that were left implicit in *Good Morning, Miss Dove* and *To Sir, With Love*: “Whose culture is being reproduced?” “From what motivations?” and “To whose benefit?”

The novel achieves this exaggeration by using metaphors of literal, physical reproduction to portray the effect of Brodie’s teaching. On countless occasions, the Brodie set is described either as a physical extension of Brodie herself, or a physical reproduction of her. For instance, during one of their afternoon walks, “Sandy looked back at her companions, and understood them as a body with Miss Brodie for the head. She perceived [the girls] . . . all in a frightening little moment, in unified compliance to the destiny of Miss Brodie, as if God had willed them to birth for that purpose” (46). (This metaphor resonates in Brodie’s frequent assertions that she intends to put “old heads on young shoulders.”) David Lodge has convincingly argued that this passage is intended to parody the Christian doctrine of Christ as the head of His church, yet the reader should not lose sight of the more immediate, physical implications of the metaphor: Miss Brodie attempts to shape the girls in her own image, creating of them extensions of herself. Indeed, when Mr. Lloyd, the art teacher, says he wants to paint the whole set together, Sandy comments, with irritation, ““We’d look like one big Miss

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<sup>15</sup> Her fondness for fascism, for instance, prompts her to encourage a student to go fight in the Spanish civil war, ultimately leading to the student’s death.

Brodie, I suppose” (150). Sandy’s estimation of the degree of Brodie’s influence proves to be rather accurate. After the set has graduated to the senior school, the headmistress begins in earnest her efforts to oust Brodie from her position, frequently interviewing former students to collect evidence of Brodie’s misconduct. The narrator notes that the set remains consistently silent during these interviews, for “there was now very little they could say without implicating themselves. By the time their friendship with Miss Brodie was of seven years’ standing, it had worked itself into their bones, so that they could not break away without, as it were, splitting their bones to do so” (168).

I contend that there is an unmistakable element of the grotesque in all of these images of splitting bones and interchanging body parts. In fact, there are senses in which *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* recalls Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Certainly, the notion of putting “old heads on young shoulders” echoes Victor Frankenstein’s efforts to fashion a new living being out of older body parts, and the image of Brodie’s influence infusing her students’ bones recalls the primal way in which the Creature feels connected to Victor. Just as *Frankenstein* is a tale of a man using education to foster unnatural reproduction, then, I argue that *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is also a tale of a woman using education to reproduce in dangerous ways. (Again like Frankenstein, Brodie lives to see her “creation” grow to be the cause of her downfall.) The fact that this danger is revealed so overtly, in large part through the images of physical distortion noted above, is what separates this novel from those examined in Section I.

Of course, my original claim was that this novel exposes the dangers of employing the school for *cultural* reproduction, while the metaphors just cited seem to speak to individual, biological reproduction. It is quite true that Brodie’s efforts to shape

her students in her own image have an intensely personal, almost parental, nature. Jo Keroes rightly notes that “real parents’ faces are curiously absent” from the novel (40); indeed, readers learn very little about any of the Brodie set’s biological parents, leaving Brodie as the only parental figure readers are privileged to see. In the same way, absent of any biological children herself, the set seems to serve as the only outlet for Brodie’s parental urges. In fact, an important detail of the novel that critics have not yet discussed is the fact that Brodie does not create a new set after her original group of favorites has graduated into the senior school.<sup>16</sup> If these girls function as Brodie’s substitute “children,” this detail seems logically sound; just as parents don’t typically “replace” their children every few years, so Brodie doesn’t replace her “set” when it graduates.

What prompts me to view this novel as more than the mere story of a childless woman displacing her parental urges onto the students she teaches, however, is the specific nature of the self she is trying to reproduce, for with Miss Brodie, the personal is quite obviously political. She makes authoritarian pronouncements on the proper beliefs the girls should have about art, politics, and religion, suggesting that she is attempting perpetuate certain cultural standards, conveyed as personal beliefs. She even schools the girls on how to view the line of unemployed men that the group passes on one of their walks through the city: though she calls them “our brothers,” she says the girls must pray for them, explaining that “sometimes they go and spend their dole on drink before they go home, and their children starve” (59). Masked as compassion, this condescension towards a class of people that Brodie views as an “uncivilized” Other is imparted directly

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<sup>16</sup> At the end of the novel, the headmistress does tell Sandy that Brodie is forming a new set (182), but since she’s in the act of trying to persuade Sandy to betray Brodie, it is quite possible that the headmistress fabricated this information only to make Sandy herself feel betrayed by Brodie. No other evidence in the text confirms that Brodie was forming a new set.

to her students. This, and similar assumptions about class, nation, and religion that she professes to her set, leads me to conclude that Brodie's aim is to reproduce in her students not just a few personality quirks, but as Joyrich has suggested, "an imperialist cultural heritage" (49).

In this way, the novel's constant reference to Miss Brodie's being reproduced in her students exaggerates, almost to the point of grotesque distortion, the same pedagogical tendencies witnessed in *Good Morning, Miss Dove* and *To Sir, With Love*—that is, the impulse to produce through the schools a set of homogenous citizens, unified, if not in terms of their places in society, then in terms of their *understanding* of what those places are and who may assume them. It is through the resistance of Sandy, the student who ultimately decides to "betray" Miss Brodie, that the novel exposes the ways in which such unification can become repressive. To return to Biddy Martin and Chandra Mohanty's discussion of "home" in feminist discourses,

When one conceives of power differently, in terms of its local, institutional, discursive formations, of its positivity, and in terms of the production rather than suppression of forces, then unity is exposed to be a potentially repressive fiction. It is at the moment at which groups and individuals are conceived as agents, as social actors, as desiring subjects that unity, in the sense of coherent group identity, commonality, and shared experience, becomes difficult. (204)

The story of Brodie's teaching illustrates this difficulty more explicitly than do the stories of Miss Dove and Sir, simply because her attempts to unify her set are so extreme and her efforts extend over such a long period of time. More than vilifying her individual character, however, I would like to suggest that the figure of Miss Brodie exposes the tensions inherent in viewing the school as the nation's primary site of cultural reproduction. As Jo Keroes has argued, "Miss Brodie . . . embodies society's conflicting desires for freedom and restraint. The strategies by which a culture transmits knowledge

and thereby perpetuates itself coexist uneasily with its fondness for the rebellious gesture and the appeal of romantic individualism” (36). Because her pedagogy so explicitly reveals the school’s inability to easily accommodate these contradictory desires (for freedom and restraint), Miss Brodie must be displaced from her teaching position.

Brodie’s forced exile from teaching is no more cheerful than Anna’s voluntary departure from her teaching post in *Spinster*. Like Anna, Brodie feels acutely the loss of a vocation to which she had once felt so passionately committed. In addition to depicting Brodie’s personal disappointment, the novel also offers a rather bleak view of the degree to which any type of home-like community might be created in the space of the school. In fact, Nina Auerbach and David Lodge, critics who have offered two of the most varied yet insightful readings of the novel to date, reach similar conclusions about text’s final commentary on the nature of communities in general:

Rife with egoism and backbiting, Spark’s communities may be the only saving remnants [of “community” in any nineteenth-century sense] the twentieth century can accommodate. (Auerbach 169)

Buried in this largely comic novel there is a severe and uncompromising dogmatic message: that all groups, communions and institutions are false and more or less corrupting except the one that is founded on the truths of Christian orthodoxy—and even that one is not particularly attractive or virtuous. (Lodge 135)

Because the school community is the one most closely scrutinized in this text, it stands to reason that these two critics’ dismal appraisal of communities in the novel applies most directly to that of the school. In this way, while *Spinster* and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* may focus on slightly different issues of teaching and domesticity, they both arrive at a similarly desperate view of the community of the school and the teacher’s uneasy position within it. Recognizing the degree to which classrooms are not a “home”

in any sort of idealized sense—consistently safe, always nurturing, or free from conflict—these two novels set forth the possibility that in fact, the inverse may be true: classrooms may be essentially “false,” “corrupting,” and “rife with egoism and backbiting,” even as they pose as homes-away-from-homes.

Thus, the novels of Section II serve as correctives to the idealized notion, examined in Section I, of the teacher as the guarantor of domestic tranquility. These two texts rightfully reveal many of the limitations that this notion may place on students and teachers alike. In so doing, however, these novels seem to despair of domestic tranquility altogether, leaving little room for any revised vision of what the space of the school might become. In contrast, the novels that are grouped into Section III acknowledge many of the complicated tensions laid bare by the novels examined in Section II, without resorting either to a state of “homeless” desperation, or to a state of sentimental daydream. Insofar as they suggest a renegotiated, perhaps tempered, view of the school as a home-like space, then, the novels of Section III can be seen as “Redefining the Domestic Interior.”



### SECTION III

#### REDEFINING THE DOMESTIC INTERIOR (OR, DOING SOME HOME RENOVATIONS)

Challenges to idealized notions of the school-as-home, such as those examined in the previous section, were not only surfacing in fictional narratives of this time. Several important non-fictional texts, educational researchers' accounts of public schools and the ways in which they were failing both poor and non-white students, were being published, as well. Most of these texts swung the pendulum of "domestic" rhetoric to an extreme that is opposite of the rhetoric examined in Section I, casting the classroom not as a safe haven of warm shelter and nurturing, but as a space of danger and even violence. Indeed, their titles themselves indicate the same sort of critique suggested in the texts of Section II. Most notably, Jonathan Kozol's *The Night is Dark, and I Am Far From Home* suggests the same sense of isolation and despair experienced by the two "homeless" protagonists of Section II. Sunny Decker's *An Empty Spoon*, rather than sentimentalizing an abundance of love and security within classrooms, mourns the deprivation and lack that characterize certain children's experience of school. And similarly, rather than celebrating the "blackboard jungle" that adventurous teachers might bravely set out to explore, Kozol trenchantly criticizes the *Savage Inequalities* of America's schools.

Insofar as they highlight the ways in which some children's (and teachers') experience of school does not mirror the idealized notion of the classroom as a "home away from home," these texts, both fictional and non-fictional, are invaluable. They help readers deconstruct potentially repressive "domestic" myths about public schooling. Yet as Catherine Wiley and Fiona Barnes have noted in their introduction to *Homemaking*:

*Women Writers and the Politics and Poetics of Home*, “reconstruction should follow deconstruction.” Calling attention to the tendency of certain late twentieth-century texts to glorify dislocation and displacement, Wiley and Barnes issue an important reminder that “real homelessness should not be romanticized” (xvi). It seems that what is necessary, then, are additional “school stories,” stories that build on the critique issued in the texts discussed above, but do so with an eye towards constructing an alternative vision of what a school/home space can be.

Bel Kaufman’s *Up the Down Staircase* (1964) and Tom Perrotta’s *Election* (1998) are two such texts. I assert that these novels successfully answer a challenge, issued by Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty in their study of the rhetoric of “home” within feminist discourses, “to find ways of conceptualizing community differently without dismissing its appeal and importance” (192). The protagonists of these novels come to the same realization achieved by those protagonists of Section II: that classrooms are enmeshed in systems of power and domination that operate despite—and perhaps because of—the ideal of domesticity imposed upon public schools and their teachers. Yet their acknowledgement of these hierarchies of power does not lead these teachers to abandon altogether the idea that some sort of more equitable community can be forged within the space of the school. In fact, it is precisely this acknowledgement that spurs them to re-envision a new *kind* of community. Moving from a view of the school as some sort of stable, coherent home-like space, free from conflict and pain, these teachers eventually recognize that a school community, like a home community, “is the product of work, of struggle; it is inherently unstable, contextual; it has to be constantly reevaluated in relation to critical political priorities” (Martin and Mohanty 210). What

these novels posit, then, is that there is great value, in the form of increased understanding of the self and of others, in learning to name (rather than deny) the operation of larger systems of power, and in learning to consistently interrogate one's position within those systems—a proposition that may not lead to “safety,” *per se*, but will undoubtedly facilitate forms of learning that are crucial to engaging the world in an honest and ethical manner.

### ***Up the Down Staircase***

*For parent's name, can I use my aunt?*

Put down your mother's name.

*I got no mother.*

Well—do the best you can.

—From *Up the Down Staircase*

Bel Kaufman's 1964 *Up the Down Staircase* was in many ways the American successor to *The Blackboard Jungle*. Like Hunter's earlier novel, Kaufman's text recounts the story of a first-year teacher and her experiences in a multicultural New York City public high school. At the opening of the novel, Sylvia Barrett is every bit as idealistic as Rick Dadier, and throughout the course of the novel, she encounters just as many obstacles as her literary predecessor, obstacles including unruly students, uncaring administrators, and impossible tangles of bureaucratic red tape. Like Rick, Sylvia must decide whether the rewards of teaching are enough to warrant her remaining at Calvin Coolidge High and continuing to struggle against these enormous problems.<sup>1</sup> And just as *The Blackboard Jungle* enjoyed enormous popular success, *Up the Down Staircase* was embraced by a wildly enthusiastic reading public. The book spent months on the top of

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, *Up the Down Staircase* amasses elements from most of the other novels previously discussed: a Thanksgiving dance is reminiscent of the graduation dance in *To Sir, With Love*; a pivotal stay in the liminal space of the hospital recalls *Good Morning, Miss Dove*; and much of the desperation, lost identity,

the New York Times bestseller list, and was both a Book-of-the-Month Club and a Reader's Digest Condensed Book Club selection. It has since been translated into 16 languages, seen 47 printings, sold over 6 million copies, and been adapted into a beloved and award-winning film starring Sandy Dennis.

Despite these many similarities, however, Kaufman's narrative diverges from Hunter's in significant ways, both in terms of form and content. While all of the novels discussed thus far (with the exception of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*) have been rendered in more or less standard first-person narration, *Up the Down Staircase* is more akin to the epistolary novel—though even this classification indicates a narrative pattern more regular than the structure that Kaufman's text utilizes. There *are* letters contained in this text, but the novel as a whole is a *Shandy*-esque collection of many more narrative pieces and fragments: school memos, faculty conference minutes, drawings, homework assignments, notes scribbled on the blackboard, and scraps from the wastebasket, to name a few.<sup>2</sup> Kaufman's novel also falls more suitably into the comedic mode rather than the dramatic; that is, while there are certainly dramatic moments in Sylvia's teaching experience, and while comedic episodes are certainly to be found in the novels previously discussed, humor is more integrally operative as a formal and thematic tool in *Up the Down Staircase* than it had been in earlier teacher novels.

Both of these alterations in form contribute, in ways I will later discuss, to rendering a significantly different picture of the teaching enterprise, especially in terms of how it negotiates certain ideas and ideals of the domestic. In large part due to these

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and sense of homelessness expressed by Sylvia throughout the course of the novel echoes Anna's sentiments in *Spinster*.

<sup>2</sup> Kaufman notes in her introduction to a special 1991 edition of the novel that many editors originally rejected the manuscript because it was "weird looking typographically" (xii).

formal shifts, I argue, this novel, like those of the previous section, works to reveal as inaccurate certain idealizations of home—both the personal, familial home and the school as home. If Anna discovers in *Spinster* that the domestic interior of her national culture is not a blessed “safe haven” for all national citizens, Sylvia learns that an individual’s home and family may not be the warm cocoon of blissful isolation and gentle feminine nurturing that is presented in *The Blackboard Jungle*. Instead, she realizes, domestic isolation may be stifling and confining, and may give rise to grave tensions, and even violence, among family members. Arising out of this realization is a parallel realization about the notion of “school-as-home.” Though Sylvia begins the novel with rather conventional ideas about her students being her “children,” and how her classroom will be the space where she will save their fragile selves with her loving guidance and nurturing, as the novel progresses, these ideas begin to break down. Framed in the narrative are relentless reminders that Sylvia’s power as an individual will always be situated in and limited by the force of the institution in which she works. These reminders serve to demonstrate that the blissful isolation of the classroom that Sylvia had once envisioned is an ideal as elusive and artificial as the blissful isolation of the private home. Moreover, Sylvia learns that she herself can become implicated in domestic violence, doing harm, even if unwittingly, to those “children”/students she intends to “save.”

In all of these ways, *Up the Down Staircase* resembles those texts examined in Section II, in which the idea of home is significantly challenged and even, at times, undermined. Yet I would argue that this novel moves one step further, in that it also begins to re-figure the notion of home in order to reclaim it as a space nonetheless worth

saving. Kaufman's use of irony, paradox, and humor are crucial to this renegotiation of the ideal of the domestic, for these devices allow her to acknowledge the aforementioned tensions and contradictions of both personal and school "homes" without dismissing their value entirely. If not always harmonious, if not always safe, if not always consistent, if not always successful—this novel ultimately seems to say—home can nevertheless be a place where individuals are invited into a common space and allowed room to grow and think so that they may begin to learn how to become valuable, contributing parts of a larger community. Thus, the "happy ending" of this story is a modest one. Sylvia does return to Calvin Coolidge at the end of the novel, so the conclusion does not reenact the desperate flight or exile of the teachers of Section II; nevertheless, her return to teaching is not the triumphant return of the conquering heroes of Section I. Furthermore, many questions regarding the welfare of several individual students are left unanswered, suggesting that if school is like home, then like home, school does not save every soul, answer every question, and shelter every individual from all hardships. Released from the tyranny of these ideals, however, Sylvia, as an agent of a reconfigured school/home, may begin to accomplish smaller, yet ultimately more profitable teaching ends.

As I suggested above, the novel begins this process of reconfiguring the domestic by constructing a complex view of "home" in the personal or familial sense. In acknowledging the complexity of families and the spaces in which they live, this text dismantles many of the simplistic (not to mention false) domestic ideals suggested in Section I. In particular, *Up the Down Staircase* rebuts the notions, seen in *The Blackboard Jungle*, of home as the space of the "happy housewife"—the woman who gladly remains secluded from public life—and the notion of home as the safe and

unmolested alternative to a tumultuous, and even dangerous, “outside” world.

Interestingly, Kaufman presents this rebuttal not via an extensive depiction of Sylvia’s own personal home, but via depictions of the homes of her students and of Ellen, her best friend from college—a move that allows Kaufman a greater freedom to employ the subtle yet biting irony that is her most effective rhetorical tool in this novel.

In the case of Sylvia’s correspondence with Ellen, the subtlety of this irony is a function of the perspective of narration. Though the reader is allowed to see numerous letters that Sylvia writes to Ellen, she never sees any of Ellen’s letters in return (though Sylvia indicates in her own writings that Ellen is indeed writing back). As a result, the reader has insight only into Sylvia’s *interpretation* of Ellen’s home life, an interpretation, Kaufman seems to make clear, that is woefully simplistic. As the reader perceives the ways in which Sylvia is likely misreading the character of Ellen’s home, he recognizes the tensions between the ideals of “domestic bliss” and the realities of domestic hardships. For instance, in Sylvia’s first letter to her friend, we learn that Ellen has gone the route of traditional marriage and family, and has recently had a baby; Sylvia writes, “You seem to have done better with your education than I: while you are strolling through your suburban supermarket with your baby in the cart, or taking a shower in the middle of third period, I am automatically erasing ‘Fuck Teacher’ from the blackboard” (41).<sup>3</sup> Likewise, in her second letter, Sylvia offers “congratulations on the baby’s new tooth” (62), and concludes the letter by asking Ellen to “Write! Write! And tell me of the even tenor of your days” (68).

These early letters indicate that Sylvia’s picture of Ellen’s domestic tranquility is one that is not too far removed from the domestic ideal presented in *The Blackboard*

*Jungle*. Sylvia here assumes that all days spent at home in the bliss of domestic tranquility have an “even tenor,” a claim that any parent who has cared for a teething child would likely dispute. In other words, given her own simplistic assumptions regarding the nature of “home,” Sylvia can only imagine a trip to the supermarket as a “stroll”—not as a struggle with a screaming child in the basket of the grocery cart, whose relentless screeching might, to a frazzled parent, seem equivalent to the “Fuck you”s that plague Sylvia’s own days. Likewise, a shower taken “in the middle of third period” seems to Sylvia the culmination of mornings spent in quiet and leisure (as opposed to her own early and frantic starts, we assume), and not the result of having only one small window of baby-napping freedom. Thus, while Sylvia’s comments about Ellen’s lifestyle themselves fall precisely in line with the notion of “home” as a space of warm, safe, tranquil isolation, the text itself, as it reveals the irony of those comments, challenges that notion.

Sylvia’s correspondence with Ellen also works to challenge the image of the “happy housewife,” the domestic goddess whose “place” in the home brings her utter joy and fulfillment. In each of her letters to her friend, Sylvia acknowledges or comments on some event of Ellen’s life that Ellen has assumedly shared in a previous letter. These events often center around problems with home renovations. For example, Sylvia’s fifth letter begins, “Dear Ellen, White brick sounds splendid for your fireplace, but I know nothing about flues except that they make me uneasy” (95). And in a subsequent letter she writes, “I loved your account of the painters redecorating your bedroom. Certainly, you should stand pat on pale blue and mauve; don’t let them get away with buff!” (137). Quite tellingly, in letters that are pages long, that contain detailed accounts of various

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<sup>3</sup> This, and all subsequent quotations from the novel are cited from the 1970 Avon edition.



episodes from school, the passages quoted above are the sole extent of Sylvia's discussion of her friend's domestic concerns; in other words, Ellen's problems receive a passing mention, while Sylvia's earn lengthy discussion. In addition, these letters fall well into the course of the novel, long after readers have already become accustomed to the hilarity and vitality—and challenge and frustration—of Sylvia's experiences at Calvin Coolidge. Given these letters' placement in the narrative, then, and given the slightly dismissive, borderline patronizing, tone with which Sylvia writes, Ellen's domestic concerns are rendered almost petty and trivial. That is, when juxtaposed with Sylvia's spirited and dynamic life on the "outside," Ellen's ostensible preoccupation with "buff" versus "pale blue and mauve" seems insignificant.

Obviously, I must quickly clarify my intention here: in no way am I suggesting that the work of household management, including the beautification of domestic space, *is* trivial or unimportant. Quite the contrary. What I do mean to highlight, though, is the fact that even as Sylvia's explicit comments idealize the tranquility of domestic life, the subtext of her letters nevertheless reveals a certain recognition that a world bounded by the four walls of a house can in some ways grow to be a small one. Indeed, a subtle detail in one of Sylvia's late letters betrays the fact that this *is* the case for Ellen. Sylvia concludes this letter by saying, "In the meantime, write, write soon. You too bring me a glimpse of 'real life.' One can get as ingrown as a toenail here" (218). The word "too" here indicates that Ellen has told Sylvia that her tales from Coolidge High bring Ellen glimpses of "real life," suggesting that life in her small domestic haven somehow disengages her from the life of a larger community. Such disengagement, Sylvia's final statement implies, can cause one to become "ingrown"; the domestic interior, with

boundaries that are *too* confining or limiting, can fold in on itself so that its inhabitants become not happy, but claustrophobic housewives.

Thus, this correspondence with Ellen has two effects. On the one hand, Sylvia constructs a dichotomy between the picturesque terrain of the domestic suburban home and the blackboard jungle of Calvin Coolidge High; in a letter late in the novel, she even writes, “I’m weary. Comfort me with letters of Xmas trees and hearth fires” (306). This dichotomy is presented in terms so extreme as to reveal to the reader the obvious exaggeration and inaccuracy of both poles. At the same time, however, Sylvia’s letters also render Ellen’s domestic concerns as dull, lifeless, and vapid, to the point that the reader may in fact perceive a measure of pity for the woman whose most crucial concerns are limited to what color the bedroom will be painted. Both of these effects, though, serve to deconstruct the idyllic portrait of domestic bliss presented in *The Blackboard Jungle*.

This deconstruction is augmented by the students’ descriptions of their homes and families, domestic scenarios that prove to be far less idyllic than even Ellen’s, compounded as they are by their location in poor, urban sections of New York City. In the opening scene of the novel, in fact, the reader immediately recognizes that home, for many students of this high school, is not tranquil, stable, or safe. The scene recounts, significantly, the *homeroom* period of the first day of school. Sylvia has instructed the class to fill out index cards, on which they are to state their names, addresses, and other pieces of essential personal information. Much confusion ensues, largely due to the fact that the character of the students’ homes resists conventional description and delineation

(in the following quotes, the italics are contained in the original, indicating Sylvia's voice, while the non-italicized lines denote student voices):

For parent's name, can I use my aunt?  
*Put down your mother's name.*  
I got no mother.  
*Well—do the best you can.* (16)

Not only is there confusion about the make-up of the family, about who and what constitutes home, there's even confusion about where home is physically located:

I don't know my address—we're moving.  
*Where are you moving?*  
I don't know where.  
*Where do you live?*  
I don't live no place. (16)

One must entertain the possibility, of course, that these students are merely being obstinate, or perhaps more generously, that they are typical teenagers testing the patience of an authority figure with defiant remarks such as "I got no mother" and "I don't live no place." This may be the case, but I would argue, especially in light of later scenes (which I will discuss momentarily), that their claims here about their homes are true. Indeed, a measure of their frustration and stubbornness may stem from the fact that for them, the ideal of home as a blissful sanctuary has no place in the reality of their own lives; the ideal has been dismantled to the point that they now have trouble identifying exactly what and where home is.

The events of the first day of school quickly open Sylvia's eyes to this fact, and later classroom episodes serve to reinforce it. For example, after watching a number of her students drop out of school entirely, she asks her English class to write a composition on the question of why they would want to drop out before graduating. Their responses

center largely around issues of domestic hardship. One student, who signs his name “Failing,” writes:

To be honest I tell you I have more trouble with my mother because she is a sick lady and there is no one to take care of her untill I come home from school. She’s got heart trouble so she can be here today and gone tomorrow thats why there isn’t much use for me to do a lot of school work because there other things in life like a job for a living. After all some day I’ll get married and I have to take mother to live with me and my wife so what’s the use of school. (140-41)

This student’s snapshot of his home life may be typical for the working poor of an urban metropolis, but couldn’t be further removed from “Xmas trees and hearth fires,” the domestic fantasy Sylvia invokes in her letters to Ellen, and in which, to a degree, she still seems to believe. Indeed, with this child working to support his single mother, and with his matter-of-fact assumption that in the future, he will continue to care for his ailing parent, this student’s experience details a significant departure from the suburban domestic ideal.

Another student, “Ambitious,” recounts a similar domestic configuration: “I know my father passed away a year ago and my mother is of course nervous about it so I want to make plenty of it to be my own boss” (141). As in the former student’s account, issues of class compound the breakdown of the conventional domestic fantasy here. Home can be neither safe nor tranquil when parents, sensing their own degraded position in the hierarchy of capital “bosses” and laboring “workers,” pass on to their children a relentless desire to climb up from that degraded position. A later section of the novel, containing a series of students’ excuses for not doing their homework, reveals similar domestic dynamics:

I have to work after school and they kept me til midnight. [. . .]  
I had to take care of my three siblings because my mother is in the hospital. [. . .]

There's no room in my house now my uncle moved in and I have to sleep in the hall and couldn't use the kitchen table. (164-65)

The home space that had been depicted as cozily insulated in *The Blackboard Jungle* is here transformed into a space that is crowded and confining: there's "no room" there. Moreover, the domestic realm that had been a peaceful shelter from the harsh "outside" world now offers little respite to those who see it only from midnight until 7:00 a.m. Thus, the novel's depiction of the students' domestic concerns, many involving basic survival issues, ultimately works towards the same purpose as its depiction of Ellen's home: both serve to undercut Sylvia's simplistic notions of "home" as a realm of pure peace and tranquility.

The novel's challenge to this sentimental notion of domestic tranquility does not stop with the space of the familial home, however; the challenge is extended to similarly idealized notions of the school-as-home. The connection between these two "domestic" spaces is made explicit in one of Sylvia's letters to Ellen:

[Mother] worries about my living alone in the big city, without a real kitchen. And she keeps sending me clippings from the Johnstown, Pa. papers: rape, assault, murder. With one stark warning scribbled in the margin: 'Be careful!' Only in school, she feels, am I safe.  
I wonder. (97)

Sylvia's mother here idealizes school as an adequate substitute for the domestic haven she believes Sylvia to be lacking, since Sylvia is unmarried and without children. (Her house doesn't even have a complete kitchen, for Heaven's sake!) She goes on to reason that school, as an extension of the traditional home, must be safe, just as home is safe. Yet even if Sylvia has inherited these sentiments from her mother, she has obviously, via the stories of her students' homes, begun to recognize the ways in which domestic spaces

are not always stable and tranquil, and consequently, she here begins to “wonder,” just as Anna does in *Spinster*, about the stability and tranquility of the school-as-home.

Indeed a great majority of the novel is devoted to depicting the reality that school is no more an ideal safe haven—for students or teachers—than home is. In this text, the classroom is not the cozy, sheltered cocoon of like-minded individuals that it is in *Good Morning, Miss Dove*. As Sylvia reports to Ellen, “I’ve got unexcused students, unauthorized students, non-authenticated students, illegitimate students, loitering students and absent students—and still they add up to 223 in my subject classes, besides the 46 in my homeroom” (40). Here the classroom is crowded, not cozy; vulnerable, not sheltered; disparate, not homogeneous. Thus, while school administrators may direct teachers, on the first day of school, to “point out the nature and function of homeroom: literally, a room that is a home, where students will find a friendly atmosphere and guidance,” in many ways, the school-home, like the personal homes described above, becomes a space of *discomfort* and danger (28).

One of the most obvious ways in which Kaufman leads the reader to this conclusion is via her descriptions of the physical space of the school. For instance, Sylvia is a “floater,” meaning that she travels from room to room to teach rather than remaining in the same classroom all day—a consequence of the school’s not having enough classrooms to support all of its classes. Literally without a “room of her own,” she is homeless at school, just as some of her students are homeless outside of school. Similarly, the teachers’ lounge no longer occupies the central space of the school, as it did in *The Blackboard Jungle* and *To Sir, With Love*. At Calvin Coolidge, it has become a make-shift facility located in the supply room in the basement (39), a shift that might

indicate that the notion of an idyllic domestic interior, as it was configured in previous texts, has to a large degree collapsed.

In fact, this novel lays bare one of the fundamental realities of public schoolteaching that the texts of Section I only subtly suggest, if not overlook entirely: economic hardship. Curiously, the fact that teachers are (for the most part) grossly underpaid is well-known both among teachers themselves and in the general public at large, yet it is a fact little discussed in those texts that attempt to portray teachers as the happy protectors of a blissful domestic tranquility. As essayist and high school teacher Garret Keizer notes in a commentary on “Why We Hate Teachers,” “teachers can find themselves an embarrassing exception to the first article of their own creed: that education prepares one to be privileged and prosperous” (40). *Up the Down Staircase* explicitly unveils this contradiction: one of the memos the teachers receive early in the school year is an advertisement from the “EEZYTERM CONFIDENTIAL LOAN COMPANY,” a circular that includes a brochure on how to solve financial problems. The novel’s outright acknowledgment of such breaches in domestic “tranquility” thus challenges another aspect of the school-home ideal.<sup>4</sup>

The novel also illustrates that if the space of the school can be discomforting to the teachers, it can be even more so to the students. For example, when Sylvia assigns to one of her English classes the writing prompt, “What have you gotten out of your English classes thus far,” one student responds “nothing,” and notes that there’s “no place to learn. Last term we had no desks to write only wet slabs from the fawcets because our English was in the Science Lab and before that we had no chairs because of being held in

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<sup>4</sup> Though even here, the loan company is “confidential,” as if financial strain is an anomaly that needs to be kept secret.

Gym where we had to squat” (80). Like the decline of the teachers’ lounge into the basement supply closet, the space of the students’ school-home is becoming displaced as well—almost to the point of disappearing entirely. Even when there *is* a “place to learn,” the physical condition of that space is often deplorable. In Sylvia’s homeroom, doors off their hinges, bookcases with splintered shelves, and windows broken, with glass shattered all over the floor constantly impede the students’ ability to concentrate, not to mention jeopardize their physical safety (48). In a letter to Ellen, Sylvia describes the school building as “hostile,” noting its “cracked plaster . . . carved up desks, gloomy corridors, metal stairways, dingy cafeteria . . . and an auditorium which has no windows” (42). In this way, the physical condition of the building indicates that for the students, too, the “home” space of the school is disintegrating; it is not hospitable but hostile.<sup>5</sup>

Not only does the novel reveal the physical danger that inhabitants of the school-home may face, it also speaks to the more subtle forms of repression and abuse that can be enacted in the school, as well, often by means of the pedagogies seen practiced by the teachers of Section I. For instance, Rick’s pedagogy of domination is mirrored in this novel in the school’s vice-principal, Mr. McHabe. Sylvia recounts to Ellen his philosophy of teaching, as he unfolded it for Sylvia during an argument over how to deal with a “problem student”:

Sure, we’ve got to win their respect, but through fear. That’s all they understand. They’ve got to toe the line, or they’ll make mincemeat out of us. You ever seen their homes, some of them? [ . . . ] These kids are bad. They’ve got to be taught law and order, and we’re the ones to teach them. [ . . . ] All you people who shoot off ideas—you just try to run this school your way for one day, you’ll have a riot in every room. (179)

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<sup>5</sup> The members of the school also practice bomb drills, suggesting that the national domestic interior is being threatened in ways similar to the familial and school interiors.



McHabe's approach to winning respect through fear assumes the presence of a savage Student Body that lurks in the depths of the blackboard jungle, waiting to make "mincemeat" of all teachers who won't police them into "law and order."

This novel departs from its predecessors in Section I, however, in that it recognizes explicitly many of the costs of maintaining a school/home space through "containment" measures such as these. Miss Dove's students, though slightly afraid of their "terrible" teacher, are nevertheless depicted as sitting contentedly obedient in their orderly rows, and as adults, they recollect with fond gratitude the controlling hand of Miss Dove's guidance. Sir's students, at first resistant to his "pedagogy of politeness," are portrayed as equally thankful for the paternalistic oversight of their teacher. In contrast, Sylvia's students, largely because they speak directly for themselves in this multi-narrated text, voice loud opposition to such teaching. For instance, Joe Ferone, a bright but rebellious student, answers the aforementioned essay prompt ("What have you gotten out of your English classes thus far?") with the following comments:

You teachers are all alike, dishing out crap and expecting us to swallow it and then give it back to you, nice and neat, with a place in it for the mark to go in. [. . .] Except for one man in this whole school no one has even given a damn about me, and it's the same at home and in the street outside. [. . .] Don't worry, you'll find plenty of others willing to play your game of baah, baah, little lost lambs, come back to school. But trot in step, double file. (90-1)

Discernable in this student's anger and hostility is an insightful recognition of how patronizing the conventional "school as home" equation can be for students. (Note that he twice links the dynamics of the school to the dynamics of "home," once explicitly in the middle of the passage, and again in the metaphor of the lost lambs.) He identifies the oppressiveness of "keeping in line" pedagogy like Rick's or Miss Dove's, and exposes the high price students pay—in conformity—for submitting to that pedagogy.

Sylvia, too, begins to recognize this cost, as she sadly reports to Ellen:

There is a premium on conformity, and on silence. Enthusiasm is frowned upon, since it is likely to be noisy. [. . .] [The students] are not allowed to remain in a classroom unsupervised by a teacher. They are not allowed to linger in the corridors. They are not allowed to speak without raising a hand. They are not allowed to feel too strongly or to laugh too loudly. (76)

Sylvia, like her student above, identifies explicitly the human costs of maintaining a homogenous domestic interior via the school: repression of individuality, stifling of creativity—costs that were subtly suggested but ultimately overridden in the texts of Section I. Here, they surface to occupy a primary place in the narrative, so that for Sylvia, McHabe “has crystallized into The Enemy” (64).

It’s worth noting, of course, that students are not the only ones shown to pay this price. After all, in McHabe’s speech above, the vice-principal “schools” Sylvia with precisely the same brand of “law and order” pedagogy that he is exhorting *her* to employ in the classroom, using fear to coerce her to toe the conventional school line. Indeed, the novel exposes many ways in which teachers, too, are exposed to certain degrading abuses in a school defined and maintained through the traditional “domestic policies” seen in Section I. For instance, Sylvia recounts how the teachers line up each morning at the time clock, finding the card with their name on it, punching in their arrival time, and placing the card into the IN rack (44). This factory model of beginning the work day reveals that the project of producing standardized, homogenous students in essence relies on a standardized, homogenous faculty. Moreover, the factory model exposes the ways in which teachers are often kept in positions of class and gender subordination, male administrators having the freedom and authority to manage the work of the hired women laborers.

Similarly, school administrators are shown to strictly regulate the spaces that students and teachers alike are allowed to occupy, relying on a highly complicated code of dismissal bells that signify when and where school members are allowed to move about the school. Thus, the image suggested by the title itself refers to the “insolence” of a student who is reprimanded for going against the grain of the established system of moving about the school (111). Yet Sylvia and her colleague, Bea, also fight against this system, arranging clandestine meetings in out-of-the-way lavatories in order to smoke a forbidden cigarette.<sup>6</sup> The mechanisms put in place to create and maintain the homogenization of the domestic interior of the school, this novel reminds us, make little distinction between student and teacher, both of whom must be regulated in order to “keep the peace.”

In all of these ways, then, the notion of the school as a warm, home-like space, with all of the nurturing, comfort, and safety of the ideal familial home, becomes increasingly absurd in this novel. In addition, the text exposes the weakness of another powerful element of the “school as home” configuration: the idea, voiced by even the earliest American proponents of mandatory, state-supported education,<sup>7</sup> that the school is *the* place where individuals learn to become active, responsible citizens of a democratic society. Of course, this was the notion at work in *Good Morning, Miss Dove*: the safety and harmony of the tellingly-named *Liberty* Hill community was secured by its children’s

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<sup>6</sup> The fact that Sylvia and Bea *do* defy school policy exposes the fact that even the most vigilant attempts to exact rigid conformity from large groups of individuals simply don’t succeed in all cases. Indeed, the school’s regulations often become twisted and distorted in their own complexity, ultimately subverting their original intention. Therefore, in addition to the memos from the chief clerk explaining the day’s convoluted system of bells, the faculty also receives regular directives to “disregard all bells.” And a handsome English teacher persuades the chief clerk herself to punch in his card every morning, while he spends first period, which happens to be his unassigned period, drinking at home. The rigid order of Miss Dove’s “adamantine regulations,” it seems, is here breaking down, suggesting another way in which the conventional school/home is being threatened.

experience of Miss Dove's teaching. In *Up the Down Staircase*, it is the good-hearted principal of Calvin Coolidge who regularly voices the idea that the school should be a microcosm of the students' democratic homeland. For instance, the principal's column in the first student newspaper of the term offers the students the following thoughts:

Your education has been planned and geared to arm and prepare you to function as mature and thinking citizens capable of shouldering the burdens and responsibilities which a thriving democracy imposes. It is through you and others like you that the forward march of democracy, spurred and fortified by a thorough and well-rounded education, will move on to greater triumphs and victories. (58)

While these sentiments are certainly admirable, they are presented in terms so vague and general that they become virtually indecipherable. There may, in fact, be a connection between a "well-rounded education" and "thriving democracy," but it has become utterly lost in the inflated rhetoric of the principal's column. What may be a well-intentioned ideal, then, is nevertheless rendered hollow, thereby stripping the ideal of its force. Indeed, in many senses, the novel stands as an illustration of how schools often *fail* to establish themselves as mini-democracies that allow students and teachers alike to act as "mature and thinking citizens."

First, as was mentioned above, the novel reveals the ways in which schools can suppress rather than encourage independent thinking and decision making, suggesting that the type of schooling seen in the novels of Section I can be decidedly *undemocratic*. Rick's pedagogy of domination, Miss Dove's pedagogy of keeping students "in line," and Sir's "pedagogy of politeness"—all mirrored in various characters in Kaufman's novel—are revealed as doing little to equip either students or teachers to make informed, independent decisions about how to contribute to the welfare of a larger community. In exposing how all of these pedagogies rely on the sort of repressive, patriarchal measures

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Jefferson and Horace Mann, to name only two.

described above, the novel illustrates how proponents of them, like Vice Principal McHabe, can be more aptly described as dictators rather than democratic leaders; as Sylvia describes, he is “the kind of petty tyrant who flourishes best in the school system, the army, or a totalitarian state” (67). Under the rule of such a “tyrant,” students have little to learn other than to keep step and keep silent—certainly not the best way to become a “thinking citizen.” In fact, the one trace of aesthetic beauty in the otherwise broken, damaged school building consists of a series of murals, “depicting mute, muscular harvesters, faded and immobile under a mustard sun” (42). Despite Principal Clarke’s hopes that the students will learn to “shoulder the burden” of a “thriving democracy,” these murals suggest that their education may actually prepare them to shoulder little more than the burden of silent physical labor, hidden deep within the faded backdrop of democratic, capitalist society.

Yet again, it is important to note that students are not the only ones affected by the repressiveness of such authoritarian school structures, for the novel also deflates the idea of the school as a home base for democratic training by exposing how little voice teachers, too, have in shaping the life of the school. For instance, McHabe issues a memo regarding the first faculty conference of the term. The memo states that “THE TOPIC OF DISCUSSION WILL BE ‘EDUCATION AS GROWTH IN A DEMOCRACY.’ BE PREPARED WITH SUGGESTIONS ON: SHOULD MARKS BE ENTERED ON THE RIGHT OR LEFT OF THE BLUE LINE ON THE PRC [Permanent Record Card]?” (30). Any reader familiar with the tedium of faculty meetings will undoubtedly appreciate the comic brilliance of this passage, yet it is through that comedy that Kaufman renders explicit a serious, unspoken paradox in the school-as-democratic-home

rhetoric. Here, teachers are ostensibly invited to participate in a cooperative discussion of democratic education, yet they are simultaneously discouraged from thinking too deeply or too complexly about this topic, being led to consider instead the trivialities of administrative red tape. Indeed, the minutes from this purportedly “democratic” faculty meeting reveal that Principal Clarke repeatedly curbs discussion of some of the serious problems raised by faculty members, and instead facilitates discussions of minutiae. Topics such as “the burden of the teaching-load and of clerical work,” “inadequate facilities,” “addiction among students,” and “problems of integration” are all “shelved for lack of time.” Topics that *are* addressed include the placement of a dictionary in a room shared by two “floaters,” and the crooked arrangement of the books on the library shelves. The principal’s decision to address far less important, but easier to negotiate, school issues effectively silences the true ideas and concerns of the majority of the teaching faculty.

The conventional ideal of home is debunked on any number of levels, then: personal homes are depicted as crowded, unstable, and even dangerous, and the classroom “homes” that are modeled after them are equally confining, turbulent, and repressive, no more of a “safe haven” than their familial counterparts. In this sense, *Up the Down Staircase* is much like the novels of Section II, which challenge the notion that domestic tranquility, either familial or national, can ever be happily duplicated and/or perpetuated through a cozy home-like space created in the school. So severe is this challenge, in fact, that the protagonists of Section II become either desperate or reckless in their positions in the schools, and the concept of home for them becomes so destabilized that they ultimately enter a state of exile (either forced or voluntary).

Sylvia, too, faces moments of despair as the aforementioned debunking of home unfolds over her days at Calvin Coolidge. She confesses to Ellen, “I feel lost and a bit absurd—as if I were tilting at windmills which aren’t there, or shouting in an empty tunnel. I keep trying to remember who I am” (126). As the ideal of home disintegrates, Sylvia finds herself as “lost” and groundless as Anna seemed to be in *Spinster*, and like Anna, the emptiness of being “homeless” causes her to question her very identity; her inability to “remember who she is” echoes Anna’s observation that she had “mislaid” who she was.

Sylvia’s frustration at her inability to ground herself at Calvin Coolidge leads her to apply for a teaching position at Willowdale, a small, private college. Several months later, she accepts an offer there for the upcoming fall, but due to bureaucratic complications in the New York City School Board, she is delayed in tendering her resignation from her current position. As Christmas break nears at Calvin Coolidge, she fractures her foot at an end-of-the-term assembly, an injury that sends her to the hospital for several days. There are interesting parallels between Miss Dove’s hospitalization for back surgery, during which she enters the liminal state of dream-travel, and Sylvia’s condition here, where she’s in a self-described “kind of limbo” (324). During this season that falls between semesters, she finds herself in a position of similar “in-between-ness,” where she’s not securely established at either Willowdale or Calvin Coolidge, and is forced to decide which path to pursue. This scene also resembles the critical moment in *Spinster* when Anna receives her most recent marks from the school inspectors, an event which sends her into the “no-man’s land” of abandoning home and school alike.

Unlike Anna, however, Sylvia chooses to remain at her current teaching post; yet unlike Miss Dove, who emerges from her liminal state only to return to business as usual,

Sylvia's return is not a triumphant restoration of the conventional domestic interior. I argue that this is due to the fact that out of the shattered ideal of home, Sylvia is able to reconstruct a modified vision of what a school-home is and can be. Because she can renegotiate the idea of home, she is able to return to teaching, not in the heroic, "happily ever after" fashion of Rick Dadier, Sir, or Miss Dove, but with a grounded, realistic appreciation of the complexity of the "domestic interior" of the school—an appreciation that the reader, too, gains from the experience of engaging this novel.

I would further submit that Kaufman's text facilitates this process of renegotiation by means of its formal idiosyncrasies. Perhaps most outstanding among a number of unusual formal characteristics is Kaufman's repeated use of paradox to solicit humor, a technique witnessed above in McHabe's memo regarding the faculty meeting.

Indeed, this is a technique that often surfaces in memos or circulars from school administrators, as they (apparently unwittingly) conjoin two mutually exclusive ideas or directives, such as the final comments in the following memo from the front office:

"PUPILS ARE TO REPORT BACK TO THEIR HOMEROOMS TO BE CHECKED OFF AT 2:56. DISMISSAL BELL WILL RING AT 3:05 SHARP. THIS, HOWEVER, IS UNCERTAIN" (28). Old Mr. Porter may have been able to "check his watch by"

Miss Dove's appearance on her way to school, but at Calvin Coolidge, it seems, time itself is "uncertain." Thus, this narrative technique leads Sylvia and reader alike to an understanding that the world of teaching is often one of contradiction rather than coherence. The humor that is created by Kaufman's use of paradox also provides what seems to be a much-needed space for Sylvia's renegotiation of ideals, for what is often juxtaposed in Kaufman's paradoxes are the extreme opposites of an inflated educational



ideal and an exaggeratedly desperate educational reality. Consider McHabe's memo above, and its fusion of the ideal of teaching for "growth in a democracy" and the (perhaps overdrawn) reality of ridiculously trivial paperwork. The effect of such juxtaposition is that the ideal is rendered comically—and tragically—hollow, yet what is left is not merely a shattered ideal, but a space between ideal and reality from which a new, mitigated ideal can be carved.

In this way, paradox and humor within the novel function not merely as frivolous episodes of entertainment, but as critical components of the novel's presentation of public education and teachers' negotiation of their roles therein. Sylvia's colleague, Bea, when discussing with Sylvia the best means for teaching Greek epics, even suggests that comedy "may be the only way to convey tragedy," because "humor is all we've got" (128). I argue that comedy *is* Kaufman's way of conveying the tragedy of much of public education, particularly how desperately it may fail to live up to conventional "domestic" fantasies. For example, falling just pages before the grand rhetoric of the principal's column quoted above is a passage from one of Sylvia's letters, offering a synopsis of the school world after her first few days of teaching:

We have to punch a time clock and abide by the Rules.

We must make sure our students likewise abide, and that they sign the time sheet whenever they leave or reenter a room.

We have keys but no locks (except in lavatories), blackboards but no chalk, students but no seats, teachers but no time to teach.

The library is closed to the students. (53)

Juxtaposed with the principal's inflated declarations about education's capacity to further the "forward march of democracy," Sylvia's observations here become comically bleak. Thus, paradox and contradiction seem appropriate tools for illustrating the wild disparity between educational intentions or ideals and actual effects or reality. And because such

rhetorical tools *do* disclose so overtly the space between these two disparate poles, Sylvia finds herself compelled to find a more comfortable, balanced place between them; in fact, she reminds herself that a sense of humor “is really a sense of proportion” (158).

Therefore, the one refrain heard throughout the novel, voiced primarily by school officials confronted with their own ridiculous paradoxes and impossible demands, is “Let it be a challenge to you.” We hear it, for instance, when Sylvia questions how to carry out the following directive: “At the end of the homeroom period, please send to me those students who have failed to report for check-out because they have left the building” (47). Perplexed by how she is supposed to send absent students to the office, she is answered with the standard, “Let it be a challenge to you.” Translated, as Bea explains, the phrase means “you’re stuck with it” (24), and could therefore potentially be seen as an attempt to compel teachers’ acceptance of the status quo. Yet for Sylvia, I believe it functions more as an impetus to confront the reality that the “home” of the school is a world of contradiction and uncertainty—and therefore fertile ground for her to cultivate a richer, more complex view of the domestic interior and her place in it.

Another formal characteristic of the novel that facilitates Sylvia’s reconfiguration of the domestic ideal of the school—and the reader’s understanding of that reconfiguration—is the epistolary format described at the outset of this section. As was previously noted, *Up the Down Staircase* is not a continuous first or third person narration, but a collection of narrative fragments written by any number of characters, a form that achieves several complementary effects. First, the fragmentation of the narrative structure parallels the fragmentation of school life: school days are divided into periods; class periods are broken up by drills, unexpected announcements, and other

interruptions; and teaching becomes a collection of instructional moments, rather than long, unbroken lectures or discussions. Similar to Kaufman's use of paradox, then, the device of multiple narration never lets the reader lapse into a false notion of the easy harmony or coherence of the school-home.

In addition, by getting multiple perspectives on the same event—particularly the perspectives of the students—the hypocrisy of certain school ideals can be more easily unveiled. For the most part, those portions of the text that are written by students lend humor and a measure of sheer levity to the novel. Full of teenage sentiment—and sometimes genuine insight—they contain countless errors in spelling and syntax, many of which are so ludicrous that they seem intended solely to make the reader laugh. Yet their presence in the novel also stands as a measure of the degree to which the school may or may not be succeeding in its aims to “educate for democracy,” and to create a space “that is a home, where students will find a friendly atmosphere and guidance.” For example, student responses to a quiz question about “Why we study *The Myths* and *The Odyssey*” largely disprove Principal Clarke's claim that Calvin Coolidge will successfully yield “mature and thinking citizens.” One student responds, “I didn't know we'd have a quizz on it so didn't study for it, but I imagine we read it to be a round person”; another answers, “We read it because it's a classicle” (132). Such answers suggest that these students have learned that the key to educational success lies not in becoming independent thinkers, but in mimicking the teacher's beliefs and behaviors.<sup>8</sup> In this way, the narrative fragments, like the use of paradox, highlight the discrepancy between ideal and reality, thereby inviting the (re)construction of a more pragmatic ideal.

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<sup>8</sup> In fact, the first student's comment about being “a round person” is reminiscent of Clarke's own words in the principal's column, where he speaks of the benefits of a “thorough and well-rounded education.”

Therefore, part of what Sylvia must do as she attempts to reconfigure a new understanding of the domesticity of the school-home is to let go of many of her own original teaching goals and philosophies, many of which echo those of the protagonists in Section I. For instance, on the first day of school, which is particularly chaotic and disorienting for her, Sylvia writes to her colleague, Bea:

Nothing in my courses on Anglo-Saxon literature, or in Pedagogy, or in my Master's thesis on Chaucer had prepared me for this. I had planned to establish a rapport, a climate of warmth and mutual respect. I would begin, I thought, with First Impressions: importance of appearance, manners, speech, on which I'd build an eloquent case for good diction, correct usage, fluent self-expression. From there it would be just a step to the limitless realms of creativity.

That's what I thought.

What happened was that I didn't get beyond the B's in taking attendance. And I forgot to have them salute the flag, and I have an uneasy feeling that it's illegal. (24-25)

This passage reveals an interesting parallel between Sylvia's original, idealistic teaching goals, and the pedagogy of Braithwaite in *To Sir, With Love*, especially insofar as both approaches stress the "importance of appearance, manners, speech . . . diction. . . [and] usage" (topics which, it should be noted, need not be inherently oppressive, but which can quickly become so when carried to the extremes witnessed in Section I). In other words, Sylvia's teaching ideals at the beginning of the novel, presumably gleaned from her "courses in Pedagogy," closely resemble those that work to effect and perpetuate a homogenous domestic interior—which is really a domestic elite. In fact, Sylvia has been schooled so thoroughly in these conventional ideals that originally they seem to her *the* correct approach to teaching, even to the point that failing to salute the flag strikes her not as an unfortunate oversight, but as an "illegal" act, a grave failure to instill in her students a respect for the law and order of the flag, and the national interior it represents.

Yet the noise, congestion, and general chaos of the school prevent Sylvia from executing her original plans, leading her to recognize immediately that if she is to truly promote the well-being of the local, heterogeneous interior of Calvin Coolidge, she will have to renegotiate her teaching goals. She recognizes, too, that such renegotiation, insofar as it will necessitate that she forego many of the demands to protect the traditional interior/elite, may fly in the face of conventional teaching wisdom. Nevertheless, she chooses to abandon much of her focus on “appearance, manners” and “speech.” For example, the opening line of the novel is spoken by a student who, on the first day of class, greets Sylvia with “Hi, teach!”, an informality against which she originally bristles (13). Yet by the end of the novel, when she returns to Calvin Coolidge after her hospitalization, she is greeted with the very same informal welcome, this time to respond with a jovial, “Hi, pupe!”—the closing words of the novel (350). In these two phrases that frame the entire narrative, we have a dramatic reversal from the teacher/student relationships we saw in Section I: Sylvia here learns to adapt (at least some of) her language to that of her students, rather than forcing them to adopt hers. By abandoning an emphasis on “diction” and “usage,” Sylvia is able to focus more intently on providing the students accessible forums in which they can construct and express their own ideas and opinions—about the literature they read, about the school they inhabit, and about the lives they hope to lead. This revised pedagogy, utilizing role play, class debate, and imaginative response papers, moves directly to the “realms of creativity” and therefore, I would argue, more successfully develops “mature and thinking citizens” than any pedagogy of domination or politeness ever could.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Of course, in this assertion, I risk positing Sylvia’s form of pedagogy as one that somehow enables students and teachers to transcend all of the problems discussed in Section I. It is certainly not my

In addition to revising many of her teaching goals and methodologies, Sylvia learns that she must reformulate the ways in which she will measure her professional success. Teachers' cooperation in protecting the domestic elite is solicited largely through stories—like those of Section I—in which the teacher is promoted to the status of Hero. From the letter she writes to Ellen from the hospital, readers of *Up the Down Staircase* learn that Sylvia had once been enticed by such stories:

I wanted to make a permanent difference to at least one child. "A Teacher I'll Never Forget"? Yes.

I wanted to share my enthusiasm with them; I wanted them to respond. To love me? Yes.

I wanted to mold minds, shape souls, guide my flock through English and beyond. To be a lady-God? That's close.

I wanted to fight the unequal battle against all that stands in the way of teaching. To blaze a trail? Indeed. (325-26)

A large part of Sylvia's renegotiation of her place within the domestic interior of the school thus involves a renegotiation of the heroic roles she had once envisioned herself enacting. As she becomes more familiar with the complexity of the local interior of Calvin Coolidge High—its heterogeneity, its location on the outskirts of the mainstream middle class, its frustrations, uncertainties, and dangers—Sylvia recognizes that she must find fulfillment and satisfaction in much smaller, more localized teaching accomplishments. Late in the novel, she will describe these accomplishments as "unexpected compensations": "a girl whose face lights up when she enters the room; a boy who begins to make sense out of words on a printed page; or a class that groans in dismay when the end-of-period bell rings" (253). A far cry from elevating Sylvia to the

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intention to set up "role play, class debate, and imaginative response papers" as magical means of overcoming larger systems of oppression that operate within the space of the school. Doing so would simply normalize a different form of pedagogy, but would reify teaching and learning no less than do the texts of Section I. I only wish to suggest here that Sylvia's pedagogical form seems to indicate her desire to enable students to become active social agents, rather than to school them to passively remain "in their place."

status of “lady-God” or battle hero, these smaller, more specific accomplishments nevertheless seem more realistic for the community in which Sylvia teaches.

Yet rather than compromising the success of the school community, Sylvia’s new, revised indicators of achievement—while smaller in scale and scope—actually indicate a greater respect for that community in that they don’t deny its intricate complexity. These achievements thus represent a shift away from some of the previous attempts to pretend that the realm of the school is or can be something it’s not—a cozy safe haven, or a comfortable melting pot, for instance. Remaining focused on brief, localized moments of teaching success tempers the urge to make grand, sweeping claims about the effect of public education—claims that may, in their broad strokes, obscure or deny some of the knottier ethical issues of public school teaching, such as the structures of power that it utilizes, and sometimes abuses. However, it is not only the urban public schools that are implicated in the process of renegotiation seen in this novel, for when Sylvia alerts Bea that she’s considering accepting the position at Willowdale, Bea writes back:

There is no greener grass. Even in private high schools and so-called ‘better’ public high schools, there are many pressures: parental pressures for Ivy League colleges, School Board pressures, social pressures. The range of dull to bright kids is about the same, and if they drive their own cars to school, they—and their parents—tend to look down on the teacher’s lack of money or status. (297)

Bea’s comparison of “private” to “public” schools here seems crucial to Sylvia’s revision of her professional goals. Bea apparently recognizes that Sylvia, having witnessed the shattering of the domestic ideal she had envisioned for herself at Calvin Coolidge, has now displaced that ideal onto the “private” sphere of the small college. It’s as if Bea read in Sylvia’s thinking the underlying notion that “maybe the warm, nurturing, safe haven I had hoped to create for myself and my students is not achievable here, but could be

achievable in a smaller, more insulated school.” Bea’s response is one that debunks the fantasy entirely: “there is no greener grass.” All “home” spaces, even private ones (like the family homes described above), are shaped by professional, economic, and social hierarchies that, while perhaps uncomfortable, are better off being acknowledged than ignored.

The beauty of debunking this fantasy, of course, is that it allows for a clearer vision of what the realm of the school *is* and *can* be: a community of learners. In the words of Bea, in a note of encouragement to Sylvia, “Whatever the waste, stupidity, ineptitude, whatever the problems and frustrations of teachers and pupils, something very exciting is going on. In each of the classrooms, on each of the floors, all at the same time, education is going on. In some form or other, for all its abuses, young people are exposed to education” (300-01). Thus, the process of renegotiating the “home” space of the school is one of acknowledging that space’s limitations without denying its possibilities. Sylvia returns to teaching because she has not given up on the notion that the school can be a sort of home: a community of individuals working together on similar endeavors that will lead to the growth of both the community and its singular members. Yet by refusing to look askance from the problems that can plague both familial and national domestic spaces, Sylvia may be better able to resist replicating these same problems in the domestic interior of the school.

This tension between the possibilities and limitations of the school’s domestic interior is beautifully maintained in the novel’s resolution. We have already established that Sylvia returns to Calvin Coolidge, a decision that is motivated, in large part, by a packet of notes she receives from her students while she is in the hospital. While many



of these notes are tinged with the same gushy sentimentality palpable in *Good Morning, Miss Dove* or *To Sir, With Love*, it is not so much the students' words of love and praise for their teacher that strengthens her resolve to return to her previous classroom. Instead, it is the fact that many of them sign their names to their notes, for a good number of them, in the messages that had filled the "Suggestion Box" she had placed on her desk, had been too shy, uncertain, or dejected to claim their ideas in earlier portions of the novel. Encouraged by the thought that she may have helped at least a few of her students develop "courage of [their] convictions," Sylvia rejects the offer at Willowdale and returns to her former teaching home.

Yet the text does not allow its readers to imagine that her return will be any easier or more blissful than her original tenure. In fact, even before Sylvia enters the hospital, the text offers a stark reminder of the fact that not *all* students successfully gain "courage of their convictions" while in school. Just when students and teachers (and readers) are getting wrapped up in holiday cheer—students collecting money for Christmas corsages for their teachers, preparations being made for the holiday theater performance—gravity quickly overwhelms levity. Sylvia receives an overdue notice from the school library, to be given to Alice Blake, a student who had earlier attempted to commit suicide by jumping from a second-story classroom window, and who remains in the hospital in critical condition. This note not only recalls the culpability that one of Sylvia's colleagues bore in callously ignoring the obvious signs of distress Alice revealed to him, it personifies the school administration as equally impersonal and uncaring, as it mechanically spits out overdue library fines to students who haven't been enrolled in the school for months.

Similarly, the student Sylvia had tried hardest to “rescue” throughout the entire novel still faces an uncertain future by the time of her return to teaching. Joe Ferone, the bright student who, in the passage quoted above, resolutely refused to play Sylvia’s game of “baah, baah, little lost lambs,” remains resistant to Sylvia’s efforts to draw him into the fold of the school. Despite the fact that she had sided with him in several disputes with McHabe, Ferone continues to be suspicious of Sylvia’s motivations for wanting him to stay in school. Indeed, the last word the reader hears of him comes in the form of a single-line reference in one of Sylvia’s letters from the hospital: “Not a word from Ferone” (336). In this way, his absence at the end of the novel is poignantly marked, suggesting that unlike Sylvia, he may well have chosen to reject the “home” of the school. Thus, just when Sylvia—or the reader—might start to think that Calvin Coolidge High could yet become an idyllic, nurturing domestic haven, characters such as Alice Blake and Joe Ferone serve as reminders that danger and rejection are every bit as much a part of the domestic life of the school as security and acceptance.

Jo Keroes, in her analysis of the film derived from this novel, groups *Up the Down Staircase* into a subgenre that includes *The Blackboard Jungle*, arguing that

these narratives focus on the threat posed to an idealistic teacher who attempts to reach a group of recalcitrant, often hostile students, who is almost beaten down by the cruel combination of bureaucratic indifference and adolescent rage, yet who survives, bloody but unbowed, danger defused if not completely vanquished, ideals more or less intact. (54)

While Keroes is certainly correct to note that these two texts follow the same “struggle against all odds” narrative pattern, I would argue that even at the end of Kaufman’s novel, danger still lurks in the halls and classrooms of Calvin Coolidge High, and even more importantly, that Sylvia’s ideals are not “intact” but radically refigured as a

consequence of her awareness of that danger. Indeed, she even confesses to Ellen in a late letter, “I have learned my limitations and my private failures. It was the idea of teaching, the idea of kids that I’d been in love with” (336). Having learned that the reality of “kids” and “teaching” significantly differs from that idea(l) with which she had once “been in love,” she is confronted with the task of constructing a new, revised idea(l) that takes into account both “private” and institutional “limitations and failures.”

Kaufman’s narrative resolution is thus a tempered one. Sylvia does, as Keroes suggests, “survive” to return “home” to teaching, an indication that unlike the novels of Section II that seemed to abandon the notion of home, this novel attempts to reclaim the legitimacy and value of envisioning the school as a kind of domestic space. Yet it is not a home that is as blissful, safe, coherent, or self-contained as any of those depicted in Section I. It is Sylvia’s recognition of these complexities of home, however, that leads her to begin envisioning *new* ways of reconfiguring the domestic interior—ways that acknowledge its problems and inconsistencies without despairing of its worth entirely.

In the same way, Tom Perrotta’s 1998 novel, *Election*, reexamines the “elect” space of the domestic interior of the school, problematizing any simplistic notions that might idealize that space as consistently safe or stable. In so doing, the text spurs protagonist and reader alike to rethink, with Sylvia Barrett, new ways of characterizing and constituting the home space of the school.

### ***Election***

*In the distance, the school squatted in all its flat stolidity,  
a dull, two-story structure with nothing to recommend it  
except the simple, crucial fact that in spite of everything,  
learning sometimes occurred beneath its roof.*

—From *Election*

Tom Perotta's *Election* is the darkly comical story of Jim McCallister, a well-loved social studies teacher who watches his ten-year career at Winwood High unravel one spring over the course of a student government election—an election that he ultimately rigs to prevent an irritatingly ambitious student from assuming the presidency. The novel is populated with familiar faces from the high school scene: Tracy Flick, the perky go-getter and would-be student council president who seems to have been planning for college since birth; Paul Warren, lovable jock and gentle giant, whom Mr. McCallister encourages to run against Tracy; Tammy Warren, Paul's smart younger sister who's tired of being known as "Paul's smart younger sister," and who simply wants to be left alone to explore an alternative grunge culture and her emerging lesbian sexuality; and Walt Hendricks, the 60-year-old principal who attempts to mask his mild alcoholism by drinking enormous amounts of coffee from styrofoam cups as he stalks the halls of Winwood. Succinct and compact, *Election* utilizes these characters to evoke a strikingly realistic, sometimes painful, vision of the complex tangle of high school relationships. Given the complexity of this vision, the novel is decidedly *unsentimental*—certainly the least nostalgic of any of the texts discussed in this project. Yet it is precisely its lack of simplistic sentimentality that makes this novel a rich source for examining the many "domestic" dynamics of the school and the ways in which such dynamics may converge to both empower and restrict the school's various citizens.

Like Sylvia Barrett in *Up the Down Staircase*, Jim McCallister (or Mr. M., as he's known to his students) began his teaching career with an inflated idea of the school as a sheltered safe haven. Here, he believed, students would be happily led by his gently guiding hand, nurtured by his strong ethics, and comforted by his easy-going

temperament and graceful sense of humor. He also took for granted the fixedness of the boundaries assumed in the conventional configuration of the school as a “home away from home”: boundaries that separate the cocoon of the school from a hostile “outside” world of struggle and competition, for example, as well as social boundaries that ensure that all facets of the school society (men and women, students and teachers) know their “place” and will happily remain there. Like Sylvia, though, Jim experiences a certain disillusionment when he comes to recognize that the “domestic tranquility” he once imagined reigning at Winwood is in fact a social construct, an artificial idea imposed on the school that serves to obscure the actual complexity of school members’ relations. Over the course of the student council election, Jim learns that school members—students, teachers and administrators alike—are all subject to certain forms of aggression, violence, and ridicule, a lesson that dismantles his earlier belief in the school as a site of harmonious symbiosis. As he comes to recognize that all school members experience moments of loneliness and vulnerability, he is forced to reconsider the conventional “school-as-home” equation, and to evaluate the harm he may have done to his students, his teaching, and himself by subscribing unthinkingly to that equation.

Jim’s fortune at the end of the novel is not as promising as Sylvia’s happy return to Calvin Coolidge High. When his misconduct in the election is discovered, he tenders his resignation and leaves teaching altogether—presumably for good. He accepts an offer from a former student to work as a car salesman at a local dealership owned by the student’s father, a proposition that is unappealing to Jim on a number of levels. In this sense, we might say that he suffers an “exile” from teaching in the same manner as Jean Brodie. Yet even if Jim himself is not to return to the classroom, the novel as a whole

offers readers an invaluable opportunity to re-envision the space of the school, for if the conventional “school-as-home” equation is revealed as a social construct, it is by definition open to *reconstruction*. That is, as the reader is forced to confront the artificiality of Jim’s idealized vision of his classroom as a haven of safety and security, she is actually freed, with Jim, to renegotiate a new vision of what the classroom might be. Thus, while Mr. M. may never return to the Winwood faculty, he does achieve a more realistic, more sophisticated, and ultimately more productive view of the kinds of teaching and learning that can be accomplished in the setting of the public school. Moreover, the final chapter of the novel provides him an opportunity to enact such teaching and learning—albeit outside of the space of the school—as Tracy Flick arrives at his car dealership to confront her former teacher and election nemesis. The reconciliation that they are able to forge over the course of this encounter is a tribute to Jim’s newly realized insights about the complexity of student/teacher relationships, and the relative peace that the former enemies are able to achieve stands as an example of the re-configured teaching ideals that the novel seems to hold out for its readers.

It seems fair to say that even the pre-election Mr. M. is not as idealistic or as naïve about school relations as the Sylvia Barrett at the beginning of *Up the Down Staircase*. This is likely due to the fact that at the beginning of *Election*, Jim has already accumulated ten years of teaching experience, while Sylvia’s story is that of a first-year teacher. *Election* is also narrated in past tense, so that Jim’s memories of his early career may be colored by the lessons he’s learned throughout the course of the fateful student council election. In any case, his view of the “school-as-home” even at the beginning of the novel is more complex than Sylvia’s vision of the classroom as a safe, peaceful

community of like-minded and well-intentioned equals. Jim already recognizes that the space of the school is not entirely safe or peaceful, and that there is much *inequality* to be confronted among the student body.

For instance, one of the topics he's discussing with his Current Events class at the opening of the novel is a local court case<sup>10</sup> in which a group of high school jocks (not from Winwood, but a nearby school much like it) is standing trial for sexually assaulting a "retarded" girl (2). The boys' defense is that the acts, which included penetrating the girl's vagina with a broomstick, were consensual. Mr. M., while he is appalled at the boys' actions, regretfully admits that their defense stands a chance of being successful, given the social organization of the school:

We had developmentally disabled kids at Winwood, and we had football heroes, too; the gap between them was immense, almost medieval. It wasn't too hard to imagine how a lonely, mildly retarded girl might consider it a privilege of sorts to be molested and applauded by the jock royalty of her little world. They were the ones with the power of conferring recognition and acceptance. If they saw you, you existed. (2)

Jim's frank admission of the emotional (and here, physical) violence that can arise out of teenage popularity struggles suggests that he does not entirely subscribe to the wistful sentiment that the school is a safe haven, sheltered from all of the struggles and hostilities of an "outside" world kept at bay. He does note that his students were basically uninterested in the conflicts at play in national politics and current events, because they were negotiating conflicts of their own: "Their concerns were narrower—school, sports, sex [and] the unforgiving politics of the hallway and locker room" (2). Thus, Mr. M. is certainly not blind to the "politics" and social hierarchies among Winwood's students,

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<sup>10</sup> Based on an actual case.

and he acknowledges that the power struggles bred by these hierarchies can be brutal and fierce: “unforgiving.”

Yet the passage quoted above also subtly suggests that Mr. M. does not yet fully understand the *entire* complex picture of school relations. He recognizes the “unforgiving politics of the *hallway* and *locker room*,” two sites that are inhabited primarily by students (my emphasis). What he fails to recognize, however, is that these “unforgiving politics” undoubtedly extend into the classroom, as well, a space which would implicate teachers in the brutal and fierce struggles that Jim witnesses among his students. Also absent from his observation are the factors outside of the school—familial, economic, racial, political—that play into the “unforgiving politics” of the school. In other words, what Mr. M. fails to see is his own role in the complex tangle of school power structures, as well as the school’s implication in the complex tangle of larger social power structures. Indeed, the first line of the novel betrays this blindness; Jim opens, “All I ever wanted to do was teach” (1). Because the phrase “all I ever wanted” implies that what will follow will be something simple and unassuming, the very formulation of this sentiment suggests that Jim originally saw teaching as some mild, innocuous profession, and himself as an uncomplicated, harmless apprentice. Indeed, he goes on to say, “My only dream was to sit on the edge of my desk in a room full of curious kids and talk about the world” (1). Again, his use of the word “only” in “my only dream” implies that he once saw teaching as a fundamentally simplistic, uncomplicated endeavor.

Moreover, his vision of himself sitting on his desk holding forth to an appreciative audience of eager students suggests that he saw himself as a benevolent father figure,



gently guiding his “kids” into the world. What he doesn’t seem to appreciate about the role of the father figure, however, are the ways in which it often intersects with patriarchal power structures within family settings. In other words, he happily assumes the position of an ethically benign Mr. Chipsian father, but he does not actively confront the ethically problematic power that is entailed in such a position. For instance, at Winwood, following a student council election, the task of counting ballots falls to a student election monitor, whose tally is then to be confirmed by a faculty supervisor. Larry, the student who offers the original count, reports that Tracy has won by one vote. It then falls to Jim, as student government advisor, to conduct a re-count, which he falsifies, throwing away two ballots for Tracy in order to hand the election to Paul by a vote. When Larry, a strictly-by-the-book kind of student, insists that his original count was correct, and even insinuates foul play, Jim begins to get nervous. But he quickly calms himself by remembering the authority he wields as a teacher: “Larry’s agitation had the paradoxical effect of calming my nerves. Seeing myself through his eyes brought me back to the rock-bottom reality of the situation: he was the student; I was the teacher. If it came down to my word against his—absent any physical evidence—I would win” (132). Here, in a rather candid moment, Jim acknowledges the certain unfair advantage that teachers command over students simply by virtue of teachers’ superior position within the school hierarchy.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> This is not to suggest that Jim assumes teachers wield *ultimate* power in the school. In fact, he is keenly aware of school positions more powerful than his own. He explains,

That should have been a happy time in my life. I had a good job, an apparently solid marriage, and an easy, unthinking faith in my own good judgment and moral integrity. [. . .] I was restless, though. I thought about going back to school, earning a master’s and maybe even a doctorate in Education, retooling myself for the administrative track. [. . .] After nearly a decade of classroom teaching, interacting with maybe a hundred kids a day, I was itching for a chance to apply my skills on a larger scale—writing curriculum, formulating policy, developing innovative programs

Despite this candid admission, only a few lines later, Jim is once again acting as the benevolent papa: “I patted [Larry] on the shoulder, a fatherly and forgiving gesture” (134). In its suggestion that it is Larry, and not Jim, who needs fatherly “forgiveness,” this statement virtually overrides Jim’s earlier acknowledgement that teachers, too, are implicated in the “unforgiving politics” of the school. Instead, Jim envisions himself as the kind, open-armed father who warmly welcomes his prodigal son back into the secure fold of the school. In this way, Jim actively recognizes only certain (flattering) elements of the “father figure” role that teachers may play for students. Thus, in terms of his own role as a teacher, Jim’s original ideas regarding the space of the school-home are not that far removed from Sylvia Barrett’s, after all.

Like Sylvia, though, Jim—and to an even larger degree, the reader—undergoes a process of literal disillusionment, a stripping away of all his original illusions about the extent to which teachers can create a warm, caring “safe haven” in the space of the school. In the broadest sense, we come to recognize that the school in its entirety—not just the spaces inhabited by the student body—can sometimes be hostile, enmeshed in power relations that are competitive and “unforgiving.” As Garret Keizer notes in “Why We Hate Teachers,” “Although schools in a democracy purport to exist for the creation of ‘a level playing field,’ it does not take us long to discover that level playing fields exist mainly to sort out winners from losers” (39). What Jim learns is that he himself is not above participating in such competition—even with his students—for he no more wants to be a “loser” than Tracy does.

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that would help reshape secondary education. I had visions of myself as a Principal, a respected authority on school reform, perhaps even a politician one day. (35-36)  
Thus, though he doesn’t recognize it at the time that he’s teaching, his ambitions have much the same character as Tracy’s.

Embedded in this recognition, however, is a deeper and more sophisticated one still: Jim learns that his students can be legitimate competitors on the school playing field. In other words, even if he doesn't actively acknowledge it, Jim seems to be aware that the vision of the "school-as-home" to which he subscribes relies on subtle, yet undeniable hierarchical structures of power (structures examined, for instance, in the novels of Section I). He knows of the power that students do not wield in relation to teachers, and he knows of the power that teachers do not wield in relation to administrators. (On several occasions, he finds himself having to concede to the principal, Mr. Hendricks.) What he had not yet confronted early in the novel, though, are the ways in which power can be multi-directional—shifting and changing, depending on a given context. The reality to which *Election* attests is that despite the undeniably real presence of social hierarchies, not everyone—even in schools—remains as snugly in "their place" as *Good Morning, Miss Dove* or *To Sir, With Love* might suggest. As Thomas Doherty has noted in his review of the film adapted from *Election*, "the high school has become all enclosed social orb, a sealed, self-sufficient subculture whose rites are less a preparation for the great outside world than a microcosm of its pressures, hierarchies, and mind games" (36). Thus stripped of its "safe haven" construct, the school emerges as a site where challenges to culturally-sanctioned authority are often waged and sometimes won, even across gender, class, and student/teacher/administrator lines. Jim's recognition of this reality removes him from his lofty position as ethically pure "father" and implicates him in an ethically complicated struggle with his own student.

That student is, of course, Tracy Flick, the young woman apparently set to win the student government election. Jim's reaction to this student is as understandable as it is extreme, for she is an amalgam of many of the most annoying high school personas, including the obnoxious teacher-pleaser whose hand shoots up at every question, and the joiner of all extra-curricular clubs and activities. As Doherty describes, "Chirpy, clipped, [and] coiled like a rattlesnake, Tracy is that most-likely-to-succeed-and-piss-off-her-peer-group overachiever" (36). Part of what Jim objects to is precisely this disregard for the well-being of others, for he remarks early in the novel, "That girl was bad news, 110 pounds of the rawest, nakedest ambition I'd ever come in contact with. [. . .] She was a steamroller, and I guess I wanted to slow her down before she flattened the whole school" (11). We can assume that Jim is being genuine here; he is concerned about "the whole school" being "flattened" because he rightfully doubts that someone so blatantly self-serving can effectively represent the interests of the student body as a whole.

Yet the subtext of Jim's comment above reveals secondary motivations for wanting to foil Tracy's campaign. The sexual connotation of Jim's comment about Tracy's "raw, naked ambition" is unmistakable, and it points to the potential for sexual tension between student and teacher. Indeed, the novel as a whole is brimming with other sexual innuendo, fantasies, and extra-marital affairs, including Tracy's having an affair with Jim's best friend (her English teacher), and Jim's fantasizing about "fucking" Tracy "without tenderness" while he makes love to his wife (70). All of these incidents raise extremely important questions concerning gender, power, and teaching; Jim may play the "father knows best" role with "sons" such as Larry (in the scene cited above),

but “Daddy” may have different expectations for his “daughters,” a point that, for a long time, Jim never acknowledges.

If there is a measure of sexual aggression behind Jim’s desire to confront Tracy’s “raw, naked ambition,” there is also a measure of envy and even fear. Jim, too, is a member of “the school,” and if the whole school stands to be “flattened” by the “steamroller” that is Tracy, then she represents a threat to him, as well. Moreover, Jim seems resentful of Tracy’s sexualized power, which is logical, given the fact that he and his wife for months have been trying to conceive, with no success—a situation that has frustrated them both. Caught in the throes of his own mid-life crisis, complete with a stagnant marriage and a stalled career, Jim is acutely aware of the ways in which he has not secured conventional power, success, or even fulfillment for himself. Indeed, envious of her youth, energy, and dogged determination, Jim sees Tracy as poised to claim a measure of success in life that he himself has failed to attain. Again according to Doherty, “she has what he doesn’t: a promising future. [. . .] Foreseeing Tracy’s political ascendancy as ever upward and more sinister, Mister M. determines to stop her in her patent-leather shoes” (36). Filled with disappointment over all that is lacking in his own life, Jim comes to view Tracy as representative of all those unfair forces that have frustrated his own attempts to move forward in the world. In other words, at a time in his life when he feels fundamentally impotent, he sees Tracy as the embodiment of all the power he does not possess.

Yet the very form of the novel complicates this view of Tracy as power incarnate. Indeed, the novel’s form is one of the most instrumental tools in illustrating the principle that power is fluid and shifting. Like *Up the Down Staircase*, the story of *Election* is told

by multiple narrators; Jim, Tracy, Paul, and his sister, Tammy, are among those characters who take turns offering first-person accounts of the election fiasco. These personal accounts, insofar as they reveal each character's fears and vulnerability, serve to humanize each of the school members—sometimes cynically, sometimes pathetically, and sometimes touchingly. Particularly important is the way in which the novel complicates the character of Tracy. As Stuart Klawans notes in his review of the film adapted from the novel,

most commentators on *Election* have dwelt on Tracy's awfulness—a quality that does, in fact, echo throughout the picture like the twang of a rubber band . . . But *Election* also acknowledges the anxiety that lies beneath Tracy's enameled pertness. [. . .] The dirty secret of *Election* is that Tracy has every right to bear a grudge. She knows there is no such thing as fairness at [Winwood] High School. (31)

If Tracy's anxiety is palpable in the film, it is even more so in the novel, which problematizes Jim's presentation of her as a heartless member of the school's elite—privileged, but ruthlessly and undeservingly so, in their community.

Roughly a third of the way into the novel, in fact, the reader begins to learn of several ways in which Tracy *lacks* privilege. We learn, for instance, that her parents are divorced, and that she and her mother are financially limited. She explains,

Winwood's a rich town, but not everyone who lives here is rich. Since my parents split up six years ago, my mother's supported us on the money she makes as a legal secretary. My father helps out, but not as much or as often as he should (he's got a new wife now, and a two year-old son). [. . .] It's not like we're poor. It's just that we've learned to do without a lot of things that most people around here take for granted—nice vacations, new cars, expensive clothes, even cable TV. ( 81)

We also learn that Tracy's mom does not own a private home; she rents out the second floor of a large, old, Victorian house. The Flicks' financial situation is by no means dire—the items that Tracy mentions having to do without are certainly luxuries. Yet in

her suburban, upper-middle-class high school, she would have likely fallen towards the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. Indeed, her assured (or perhaps defensive) declaration, “It’s not like we’re poor,” betrays an obvious fear that her family will be perceived as such.

Tracy’s heightened awareness of the economic privilege she does not enjoy is reinforced in a scene where her English teacher, Jack, with whom she’s begun an affair, takes her to his house to have sex for the first time. When she steps into his home, she pays more attention to the material surroundings in the house than she does to her soon-to-be lover. She is impressed with the “cozy den with Oriental rugs and a tiled fireplace,” and notes with approval that “magazines were scattered across a glass coffee table, just like a doctor’s office” (44). When they reach the foot of the staircase, Tracy comments on the “great little TV room with plush carpeting and a fat, comfortable-looking couch” (45). Coming from an economically disadvantaged background, she longs for the material comforts of Jack’s middle-class home. Though it is true that Tracy is here idealizing Jack’s home in the same inaccurate way that Sylvia idealizes her friend’s home in *Up the Down Staircase*, Tracy’s attention to the ways in which the environment of Jack’s house might be “cozy,” “plush,” and “comfortable” suggests that she perceives her own home as one of uneasiness and *discomfort*.

In addition to exposing the economic disadvantage Tracy faces in relation to her peers, the novel reveals a second facet of why she “has every right to bear a grudge”: gender discrimination (Klawans 31). As I suggested above, the interplay between power, sex, politics, and gender is woven into the fabric of every page of this novel, beginning with the first sentence of the second paragraph, in which Mr. M. reveals, “The

election that turned me into a car salesman took place in the spring of 1992, when Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill were still fresh in everyone's mind, and Gennifer Flowers was the momentary star of tabloids and talk shows" (1). Evoked in this characterization of Winwood's larger national context, of course, is the sense in which women are still limited in certain public realms of work, specifically politics; either they are, like Anita Hill, powerless to prove the discrimination they face in the workplace, or they are, like Gennifer Flowers, granted "power" of a very limited nature—namely, the ability to "trap" men in tawdry sexual improprieties. This context is well-known to Tracy, young and ambitious, and burdened with the additional ambitions of her mother, who writes "fan letters to successful women [like Pat Schroeder, Anna Quindlen, and Connie Chung], asking if they had any advice for her 'college-bound' daughter" (113). Not only does she "know there is no such thing as fairness at [Winwood] High School," she knows there is "no such thing as fairness" outside of high school, either.

In this way, the ruthlessness of Tracy's drive to succeed is problematized. Though Mr. M.'s assessment that Tracy is attempting to "steamroll" the school is indeed accurate, her motivations for wanting to do so have emerged from her recognition of her own vulnerability within entrenched social power structures. Thus, all of her "vicious" actions in the novel must be viewed through this complicating—and humanizing—lens. For instance, in one of her meaner moments, Tracy comes to Winwood on a Sunday afternoon to hang campaign posters, and winds up ripping down all of her opponent's posters, as well. This is no small act, for the posters (and there are a lot of them) are an integral component of Paul's campaign; as Mr. M. explains earlier in the novel, "Paul was running as a visual image—the Student as Hero. Idealized in pastel colors, he



presided over our corridors like some kind of benevolent, otherworldly spirit” (60). To be certain, Tracy’s decision to rip down these posters is self-centered and competitive, to say the least. Yet even this action is complicated with the biting insight that follows: Tracy asks herself, “Can you imagine if I’d lined the hallways with pictures of my face? People would have laughed me out of the school. ‘What a bitch!’ they’d say. ‘Who does she think she is?’” (91). Tracy rightfully perceives a gendered double-standard here: a man who uses his physical appearance to promote his own interests can emerge as a “benevolent hero,” while a woman who uses her appearance to promote herself risks being seen as a “bitch.” Her decision to resort to covert, guerrilla tactics thus could be viewed as less the result of pure spite and meanness, and more the result of not having a level battlefield on which to fight in the first place.

Tracy’s struggles to overcome these limitations of class and gender nevertheless leave her facing a more painful conflict still: an on-going battle against loneliness—another aspect of her character that Jim seems to misperceive. Whereas Jim characterizes her as a person unconcerned with gaining her peers’ acceptance and affection, her sections of narration reveal a constant, subtle yearning to fit in. For instance, on the day of the election, she sneaks out of class to walk by Jim’s classroom, where the ballots are being tallied. Larry, the dorky election monitor who has always had a crush on Tracy, signals to her that she has won. (This is before Jim has completed his falsified count.) Tracy describes the following minutes as bittersweet: “You know that moment when they announce the winner of a beauty pageant? When Miss Texas or whoever suddenly realizes she’s Miss America and all she can do is scream and weep and hug the losers? I had mine in the hallway, with no one to hug but myself” (129). Of

course, Tracy's likening the election to a beauty pageant calls attention to the superficiality of both competitions, and the loneliness she feels in her moment of triumph underscores the emptiness of basing the success of one's life on such superficial judgements. Nevertheless, Tracy has obviously sacrificed something important—substantial connections with other people—in her drive to ascend to the top of the student government regime.

Underscoring the degree of her isolation from her peers is again her affair with her English teacher. Though the truly pathetic character in this situation is the burned-out, middle-aged high school teacher who convinces himself that a “true” love for his 15-year-old student will solve his banal mid-life crisis, Tracy, too, is shown to be pitiable in her own regard. She never conceives of herself as “victimized” by her teacher's advances; from the beginning of the affair to the end, she views herself as an equal player in the relationship. And it is precisely this perception of equality that makes her participation in the affair so sad. In fact, in one of the most poignant lines of the entire novel, Tracy reveals, “I was a sophomore. He was my first real boyfriend” (41). Absent of a father, and absent of any true friends of her own, the only affection Tracy receives (outside that from her mother) is the sad attentions of her washed-up English teacher.

After the affair is discovered, Jack is forced to resign immediately, and though Jim clearly sees his colleague as responsible for the affair, he and others at Winwood also begin to view Tracy as a seductress—a woman unafraid to use her sexual appeal to advance her ambitions. Yet when we hear from Tracy herself, we discover that once again, Jim's outside perception of her significantly differs from her own internal reality. She reflects, “It's funny to me that I have a reputation as a sexpot, because I hardly ever

feel sexy. My hair is dull and my face is so bland that I stare into the mirror sometimes and feel like bursting into tears” (113-14). In all of these ways, Perotta reveals that the young woman whom Jim sees as simply a cut-throat, unethical politician is actually a vulnerable teenager being initiated into the adult world of rivalry and competition.

Just at the point when we are poised to find Tracy a fully sympathetic character, however, we are quickly reminded that Jim’s estimation of her isn’t *entirely* off-base. Tracy *is* self-centered and devious, and she *is* determined to win the election at all conniving costs. Indeed, at the assembly where the winner is to be announced (at this point, Tracy doesn’t know of the falsified re-count, only of the original count, which she won), she is utterly consumed with thoughts of herself and her political career: “I was . . . busy concentrating on my acceptance speech, making sure I struck the right notes of gratitude and modesty and mentioned the names of all the people whose help and support I might need in the future” (140). It’s worth remembering that these words are narrated by Tracy herself, so that the reader can be assured that this perspective is authentic, and not mediated by Jim’s own biases. A tribute to Perotta’s brilliant handling of this text, though, is the fact that passages such as this one, which reveal the disingenuous and even callous aspects of Tracy’s personality, do not necessarily negate those other passages that attest to a more vulnerable, genuine side of her character. Again, according to Stanley Klawans, *Election* captures “the realistic basis of Tracy’s rage to succeed, and the corresponding realism of McAllister’s rage against her” (31).

Though I have focused here on the multiple levels of Tracy’s motivations and the ways in which she does and does not represent power in the space of the school, all of the characters in this novel, including Jim, emerge as similarly complex—and therefore,

utterly human. Even the pinnacle of the school hierarchy, Principal Hendricks, does not escape Perotta's keen scrutiny, so that Hendricks' authority, too, is shown to be variable, depending on the given context in which he's interacting. He certainly doles out commands and punishments in such a way that there is no doubt he's ultimately the man in charge at Winwood. (He suspends Tammy Warren numerous times, in part simply because he doesn't like her attitude.) Yet he is also a consistent butt of student jokes, and many students, including Tammy, are discerning enough to look through his masculine bravado to see an incompetent, inefficient old figurehead. She describes, "As far as I could tell, he earned his hundred thousand a year by wandering the hallway with a Styrofoam cup of coffee, smiling at the pretty girls and scowling at the boys who didn't play sports. Somebody should have stuck a broom in his hand and made him an honest man" (53). Tammy is also able to manipulate his authority to accomplish her own objectives: she deliberately *tries* to get suspended so that she will ultimately be kicked out of Winwood and sent to an all-girls Catholic school—a setting she imagines as a haven for exploring her emerging lesbianism.

In this way, *Election* reveals an unsettling truth about the setting of the public high school: is it more a site of antagonism and conflict than it is a peaceful "safe haven." This is, of course, no new insight for those readers who make their living working in public schools, or those who have been students in them, but as we have seen, it is a somewhat novel portrait of teaching and learning within fictional representations of schools. Unlike the novels of Section I, *Election* does not suppose that some elusive domestic tranquility can be achieved in the schools simply through the all-loving, wholly-moral nurturing of parental teachers; teachers (like parents), this novel acknowledges,

are fallible human beings whose own emotions and desires cannot be entirely suppressed when dealing with their “children.” Indeed, this novel reveals that such emotions and desires *should* not be suppressed, lest they erupt in even more dangerous and unhealthy ways than if they were acknowledged honestly. Nor does *Election* suggest that domestic tranquility can be effected through the strict maintenance of boundaries that separate the weak from the powerful, keeping both “in their place.” Here, power is depicted as fluid and negotiable rather than fixed and stable; therefore any attempt to shore up all power in the circles of an “elect” few and to deny any hint of weakness in those circles will only result in those circles being targeted more ruthlessly—even if subversively.

Unlike the novels of Section II, however, *Election* does not conclude on a note of domestic despair. As I noted at the outset of this discussion, Jim’s process of disillusionment *is* quite painful for him: he is forced to confront his own “darker” motivations in teaching, and is therefore stripped of many of the lofty ideals he had once held regarding his accomplishments as an educator. Moreover, it must be noted that the resignation he is forced to tender once the election fraud is revealed is not a happy one. In fact, as he walks to a mailbox to deposit his letter of resignation, he runs into a wave of elementary school students on their way home for lunch. He observes them regretfully, and thinks, “Like them, I carried the rhythm of the school day in my blood. I dropped the letter down the slot and knew for certain I was lost” (162). Were the novel to end with this statement, a reader might be forced to conclude that Jim winds up in a state of exile no different from Anna in *Spinster* or Brodie in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> This is, in fact, precisely the concluding sentiment captured in the film adaptation. In *Election*, the movie, Mr. M. and Tracy both wind up in Washington, D.C., Tracy blissfully continuing her political ascension as she attends Georgetown and interns for a national congressman, and Mr. M. unhappily assuming a new pedagogical role as a tour guide for the American Museum of Natural History. When he

Yet I would argue that Perotta rescues Jim from this “lost” state, even if his new “home” in car sales isn’t entirely cozy. Jim *is* repulsed by his new colleagues, who make “nigger” jokes and brag about “porking” their wives, and he finds himself completely bored during those many times when there are no customers, and the salesmen simply mill around like “vulture[s] waiting for a carcass to turn up” (179). Nevertheless, Jim does continue to experience a handful of pedagogical moments that serve to (at least partially) renew his faith in teaching and learning. For instance, Jim finds consolation in the fact that Frank Griffin, Jr., his former student who offers him the position at the dealership, doesn’t join his other colleagues in their degrading and insulting banter, but instead “walk[s] away from the conversation, shaking his head in disgust.” Jim speculates—probably correctly—that Frank’s response may be conditioned in some small part by what he once learned and thought about in high school; Jim reflects, “[Frank] was one of mine, and maybe that had made a difference” (180). Similarly, Jim runs into another former student who is working at an ice cream parlor over the summer. Lisa Flanagan, Paul Warren’s girlfriend and campaign manager in the student council election, is pleased to see her former civics teacher show up at the ice cream parlor, for she has developed a growing interest in politics but has no one with whom she can share her ideas. As she prepares his ice cream cone, they have a brief conversation about political pundits, George Will, and Adlai Stevenson, a conversation that prompts her to begin reading a Stevenson biography the next day. These experiences, while they can not restore his shattered ideal of himself as wholly benevolent father working miracles for his

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spots his former student one day, riding with her boss in his black stretch limo, Jim whimpers in frustration, “What is she doing in that limousine?” and throws his fountain drink at the trunk of the car in impotence. As reviewer Thomas Doherty notes, “Poor Mr. M. still hasn’t learned the cynical life lesson of *Election*: those who can, do” (36).

grateful kids, do remind him that there are nevertheless modest gains to be made in teaching—and that these gains, while not dramatic, are significant.

Certainly the most notable pedagogical encounter, however, is that with Tracy Flick. If the bulk of the novel serves to illustrate that the public school is not a safe haven but a site of frequent conflict, the final scene between Jim and Tracy suggests that learning can still occur despite—and indeed because of—such conflict. After graduation, Tracy decides to visit Griffin Chevrolet to pretend to shop for cars from the teacher who had wronged her. While her precise plans for this visit are not explicit, it is clear that she intends the scene to be one of confrontation rather than reconciliation. She notes, “I don’t really know what I was after. Revenge, I guess. Maybe an apology. Or maybe just a chance to look him in the eye without my mother present, to let him know I was an adult now, no longer the schoolgirl he’d humiliated and tried to injure” (185). Despite this outward bluster, however, it’s also clear that this post-graduation Tracy is particularly depressed and anxious. Not only is she nervous about going away to college and leaving her mother, she is also sadly reflective about the course of her high school career. At the yearbook signing party in the cafeteria on the last day of school, while students like Paul Warren busily exchange friendly parting messages, Tracy sits alone, rarely asked for her signature. She finds herself “devastated,” and admits she “never felt so empty in [her] life” (186). The loneliness and vulnerability she had fought so hard to counteract for four years has now risen to the surface of her consciousness: “Brooding over my future, I also found myself second-guessing my past. I grew haunted by the suspicion that I’d let high school slip through my fingers, that for all my accomplishments, I’d missed out on the essential core of the experience” (186).

Thus, by the time Tracy arrives at Griffin Chevrolet, she has forgotten all of the insults and accusations she had planned to hurl at Jim. She remembers, “It all seemed irrelevant now—the election, Mr. M.’s treachery, all those nights I’d spent wide awake, dreaming of revenge. I was about to graduate. He sold Chevrolets. High school was over for both of us” (192). This recognition sparks a moment of connection between the two, which prompts Jim to ask her how her senior year went. In a significant instant of genuine self-reflection, she confesses, “not that great, actually” (194). While the reader has already seen this kind of vulnerability in Tracy, Jim never has—and he is touched by it. Shortly thereafter, she asks him if he misses teaching, and he similarly confesses, “Every day” (195). While the majority of the novel depicts the clash between a student and teacher who struggle against the recognition that each holds power over the other, this scene depicts the growth that can occur when each sympathetically recognizes the other’s weakness—and admits his/her own. After sharing this confessional moment, Jim agrees to take Tracy to test drive one of the convertibles. Tracy drives them back to Winwood High, explaining that she needs to retrieve something from her locker. When she returns from the school, she is carrying her yearbook, which she asks him to sign. Jim hesitates, not knowing how to say “the things that needed to be said” (200). During this interlude, Tracy stammers that she’s scared about going to college, and, in one of his last pedagogical acts, Jim reassures her that she’ll be fine. In the final line of the novel, Jim remembers, “Then I uncapped the pen, took a deep breath to clear my head, and started writing” (200). The reconciliation achieved in these final gestures—both Tracy’s and Jim’s—suggests that a measure of teaching and learning can occur despite, and in fact because of, inevitable school conflicts and imbalances of power.



Obviously, the learning that is achieved in this extended scene is not of the kind that falls into any “academic” discipline. Instead, it lies more in the realms of acquiring human empathy and developing the art of negotiation and compromise. Moreover, the fact that Jim is no longer a formal teacher could suggest that this type of learning can only happen *outside of* school spaces. Yet I would argue that the kind of compromise Tracy and Jim are able to forge is a perfect example of the political process that Jim teaches in his civics and government classes, and the empathy that they eventually share for one another stands as a perfect object lesson in “the Character Issue” that Jim discusses with his Current Events class (1). In addition, it is significant that the reconciliation doesn’t take place solely in the dealership parking lot; the fact that the two former enemies return to the front doors of Winwood seems to imply that this renegotiated vision of teaching and learning can indeed be enacted within the setting of the public school.

Perotta’s novel thus acknowledges that teachers, like students, are complex beings, full of tangled emotions and desires—not all of them altruistic and noble—that cannot be easily dismissed or suppressed simply upon walking into a classroom. In this sense, *Election* squarely refutes the notion that the teacher can ever be an “angel in the school,” a perfect moral arbiter presiding over the “family” that resides in a domestic “haven” re-created in the classroom. In fact, I would argue that the novel self-consciously plays against this “angel in the school” idea, so commonly set forth in other teaching narratives, in order to effect much of its cynical humor. Jim’s lofty idealization of himself as a morally infallible father figure, for instance, is certainly derivative of the teacher personae constructed in texts like those of Section I. Like *Up the Down*

*Staircase*, then, *Election* is an honest acknowledgement that the school is a network of power structures, structures in which teachers are variously implicated—at one moment exercising power, and at another, yielding to it. This context forces Jim to recognize that his idea of the classroom as a haven from ethically complicated conflicts is more of a social construct imposed on the school, rather than an authentic representation derived from it.

Unlike the novels of Section II, however, *Election* supposes that if the idea of the school as a “domestic haven” is socially constructed, it can also be socially reconstructed, rather than abandoned entirely. Therefore, what this novel seems to hold out as a positive alternative to the implausible “angel in the school” model of teaching is a kind of education in which students and teachers come to a greater understanding of the ways in which conflict and power operate in human societies. This understanding is best achieved as all school members learn how to relate to one another through both competing and complementary desires, and as they learn to recognize each other’s—as well as their own—personal strengths and vulnerabilities. If novels such as *The Blackboard Jungle* and *Good Morning, Miss Dove* reveal the ways in which the conventional “angel in the school” view of teaching can be repressive for students and teachers alike, *Election* reveals that blindly subscribing to such a view can be dangerous, as well. In denying the fact that school spaces, including the teachers who inhabit them, are susceptible to the same competitive forces that infuse other social spaces, we create an environment where conflicts must be waged secretly and subversively, nullifying the potential growth and learning that might result from waging them honestly and directly.

Thus, *Election* re-envisioning the “domestic interior” of the school not as an idyllic safe haven, but as a space infused with the same conflicts that plague any human society—and furthermore as a space that can uniquely facilitate learning through examining and reflecting on such conflicts. Indeed, as Tracy and Jim return to Winwood High in the final scene, Jim notes not the sheltered or cozy nature of the school building, but its rather unexceptional appearance: “In the distance, the school squatted in all its flat stolidity, a dull, two-story structure with nothing to recommend it except the simple, crucial fact that in spite of everything, learning sometimes occurred beneath its roof” (196). The hopeful message of *Election* is not that learning *always* occurs in schools, or that learning easily or comfortably occurs in schools, but that “in spite of everything”—in spite of conflicts, imbalances of power, and competing desires—schools are places where teaching and learning can still occur. Though Jim’s recognition here may be “simple” and pragmatic, it nevertheless attests to the fact that the work of public education—no matter how inglorious or ethically complex it may be—remains something “crucial.”

## EPILOGUE

### LOOKING BACKWARD, THINKING FORWARD (OR, YOU CAN GO HOME AGAIN)

*The pursuit of safe places and ever-narrower conceptions of community  
relies on unexamined notions of home, family, and nation,  
and severely limits the scope of . . . feminist inquiry and struggle.*

—From Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade  
Mohanty’s “Feminist Politics”

In 1903, Charlotte Perkins Gilman published an extraordinary study on *The Home: Its Work and Influence*. A bravely defiant text, it works to unveil a number of (what Gilman terms) “Domestic Mythologies”: conventional, widely-held assumptions about the nature of American families and the homes in which they live. Much of the study centers around the damage that societies incur when women are limited to the domestic sphere. Gilman argues that when women are not given adequate education, not given adequate outlets for physical exercise and development, not given adequate opportunity to utilize their minds and skills in public work and service, half of the time and strength of the world’s population is wasted. As discerning and important as these ideas are, perhaps more insightful still is her observations that what prevents American society from recognizing such flaws in the organization and function of its domestic units is its tendency, whether out of habit or out of sentimentality and nostalgia, to idealize the home. “False worship” of the home, she contends, blinds its members to the ways in which homes can (and must be) reconceived in order to discontinue stunting the growth of society at large (Gilman 60).

Over the course of the century following the publication of this study, many of the problems that Gilman addresses have significantly diminished; in larger and larger

numbers, for instance, women have become educated and become active in the public sphere. Nevertheless, nearly one hundred years later, much of the “false worship” of the home critiqued by Gilman persists in the American cultural imagination, “domestic mythologies” continuing to shape our conceptions of both our familial and our national homes. Homes are still frequently conceived as idyllic safe havens, and their sanctity is still revered in the political rhetoric that extols the virtues of “family values.”

Insofar as public schools and their teachers, in the stories we have told about them, have continued to be linked with the “domestic interior” of both family and nation, they, too, have been shaped by their own “domestic mythologies.” This project has been an attempt to render explicit some of the contradictions and tensions inherent in those mythologies, and to rethink the assumptions on which the “domestic” space of the school, and the domestic spaces of the family and nation that surround the school, are based. Ultimately, I have tried to argue that schools are not spaces around which impermeable boundaries can be drawn, carving for the school a static “safe place” that is sheltered from the difficulties (and even danger) of a complex “outside” world governed by multiple hierarchies of power and authority. Teachers, therefore, may be best enabled to carry out their lives, both within and outside of the school, when they have deconstructed the false ideal that they, their students, or their schools can ever be free from the ethical conflicts and dilemmas that shape life in that competitive “outside” world. Thus reconceived, the “domestic” space of the school might become one not free from conflict, but one able to allow for conflict to be utilized, in small, perhaps brief pedagogical moments, as “crucial” opportunities to acknowledge and negotiate difference.

Far from posing its own static, uncomplicated ideal, however, this study leaves open many other avenues of inquiry. For example, a consideration of “the domestic” in additional genres of school narratives, such as drama, film, television, short stories, and even the “narratives” of pedagogical and curriculum theory, would undoubtedly add additional dimensions to the issues I raise here, solely in the context of novels. Likewise, as I suggested in the introduction, a study of school stories from the student’s perspective seems a necessary complement to this study of school stories from the teacher’s perspective. One might also examine the intersection of teaching and domesticity in representations of teaching that occurs outside formal institutions of learning. (Ernest Gaines’ *A Lesson Before Dying* might serve as a prime example of such a narrative. In this novel, though the protagonist *is* a schoolteacher, the majority of the pedagogical encounters represented in the text occur in the space of a prison, with the teacher mentoring a man who is sitting on death row.) Finally, a study that examines the ways in which “the domestic” surfaces in representations of teaching in higher education would serve as an interesting and valuable comparison piece to the investigation here of primary and secondary teaching in literature.

Catherine Wiley and Fiona Barnes have written that “home is . . . not an endpoint, but a constant movement towards or reconfiguration of the self in a place” (xvi). Insofar as they allow for a constant “reconfiguration of the self in a place,” the best teachers, and the best stories of teachers, reach for home in their work. Nevertheless, they must do so without clutching the “ever-narrower conceptions of community” that are critiqued above. Thus, even as they’re bound for home, they must continue to struggle to keep themselves, their students, and their readers from becoming homeward bound.

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## **VITA**

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